

THE ADVENTURES IN MODERN MUSIC

# WIRE

ISSUE 163 • SEPTEMBER 97 • £2.50 / US \$5.50

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Autocore  
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## **Sun Ra special**

Val Wilmer and  
John F Szwed  
travel the  
spaceways

## **Current 93** industrial folklore

# ROBERT WYATT

**The great awakening**

**Terre  
Thaemlitz**

**Van Dyke  
Parks**

**Ornette  
Coleman  
on stage  
with Lou  
and Laurie**

**Stock,  
Hausen &  
Walkman**  
samplers  
over Salford

**Silver Apples**  
electronica's missing link



# NU YORICA 2!

FURTHER ADVENTURES IN LATIN MUSIC  
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FANIA ALL STARS

TOTICO

LIBRE



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your monthly exploration of new music

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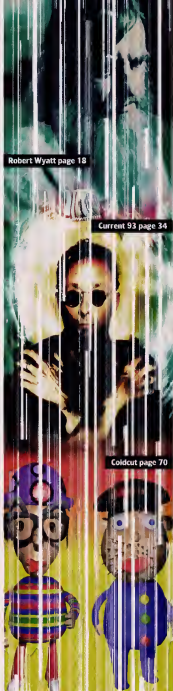
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# soundings september

## Festivals/Special Events



**Digital Slam 2** An intercontinental live jam as part of this month's Camden Pix season, featuring an international session via SON and video links hosted by Digital Osquora. Long-distance starts take place on 22 and 23 September, hooking up artists in London, Paris, New York, Johannesburg and Los Angeles. On-line musicians include Talvin Singh's Anishka crew, Vernon Reid and Marquee Gilmore. DJ Spooky, Gronowider, A Guy Called Gerald, Steve Wilkosson, and South Africa's Joburg Streets. The UK end of the event takes place at London Originals, full information from Camden Arts Services 0171 911 1648, or go to the Digital Osquora website: <http://www.digipora.co.uk/linopora>

**Now You Squeeze It** Festival of accordion music, ranging across jazz, Nuevo Tango, Cajon and Finnish avant garde takes place along the South Bank and Canary Wharf (10-13 September). Under its umbrella a number of accordion virtuosos will be making their London debuts, among them the young Finn Jarmo Puurinen, who has been described as the Jim Hendrix of accordion music. Madagascarian born Riggs Gozios, Louisiana's Eddie Luyne, Argentinian bandoneon player Juan-José, and French jazz accordionist Richard Galliano. Various times and venues, £18-£7.50, booking information on 0171 960 4242

**KinoWeekender** A weekend of back-to-back subversive cinema, video, performance, words and music, presented by the Chamber of Pop Culture, featuring rare British

appearances by the likes of US painter and performance artist Joe Coleman, Hardcore writer Dennis Cooper, underground photographer Sam Goldin, Z grade film maker Nick Zedd, cartoonist The Pizz, plus Japanese audio-visual provocateur Mochi Kawauchi and dead-dry Finn Jim Tervor. Meanwhile, the home front is kept up by Bruce Gilbert, Malcolm McLaren, avant garde Blast First duo Smith & Strenger, independent film maker Brian Griffin and DJ Gilles Peterson. London Horse Hospital, Colindale, WC1, 26-28 September, information: 0171 833 3644

**Endoscope TechoScope** The city of Graz, Austria, kicks off autumn with Steirische Herbst, a two part heavy Techno fest running on various dates through to the end of October. "Technology, ecstasy, hedonism, beauty, society, dissident" and other Techno-related fields investigated in workshops, lectures, courses and dance nights. Electro Labels: Beatless (Squeezepusher, K-Rock, DPHK Crew etc) and Underground Resistance (Rolando, Suburban Knight and Tekniskol) take over a floor each at the Mönnerstrut, Kirchbergstrasse 1, Graz, 27 September. For all dates and events during October tel 00 43 316 8230007, or fax 8357888 or check the website at: <http://www.ping.at/members/stehrbst>

**Savaged!** The Savage Pencil exhibition of ink collage portraits of musicians (some of which featured in The Wire), ranging from John Cage to Sonic Youth and The Sex Pistols, has been rescheduled. It now runs from 25 September-

Selected highlights of the month's live events, happenings, club spaces and broadcasts

26 October at Introsal, 231 Portobello Road, London W11 1, 0171 229 8010

**Planet True Music Festival** A range of contemporary classical music events spanning three weekends in London opens with the piano compositions of Keith Barnard (London Stainer Theatre, 35 Park Road, NW1, 21 September, 3pm). Later the same day, the same venue premieres two works by James O'Angelo. On 28 September (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1) you can hear female vocal quartet Rosy Voices (3pm) and John Tilbury commemorates the tenth anniversary of Morton Feldman's death (7.30pm). More events follow in early October. For full information tel: 0171 732 4624

**The Body Electric/Guitar Revolution** Canadian touring New Music festival for the electric guitar, organised by Jim Brady, and centred on Toronto and Montreal but touring in Vancouver, Jonjane, Winnipeg, Victoria and New York. Panoplistic artists include David Torn and Tim Boppy, The Fred Frith/Guitar Quartet, Esanti Orchestra (reputedly Canada's best New Music orchestra), Pacific Rim Dresher, John Oliver and Wes Waggest, René Lussier and Elliott Sharp, and more. The tour takes place between 25 September-5 October; details on 001 514 488 5946

## On Stage

**Gavin Bryan Ensemble** Three performances including the premiere of *A Plan in A Room*, performed by the composer's own ensemble and Spanish sculptor Juan Muñoz, at London Musicale Studios, Delaware Road, London W5, 18-20 September, 8pm, £10/£5, 0171 960 4242

**Marilyn Crispell/Barry Guy/Paul Lytton** *Holdings/Hill* Improvis the Belfast Crescent Arts Centre, University Road, Belfast, 5 September, 8pm, £12/£2 242 338

**Max Eastley + Ferguson Kelly** The sound sculptor and sound artist, respectively, in performance involving improvisation on inverted instruments, video projection and art installation, organised by The Sculptors Society of Ireland Dublin Anthouse, Curved Street, Temple Bar, Dublin, 5 September, 7pm, £3/£2, 00 353 1 872 2364

**Einsteintanz Neuland** bring their enlarged line-up to play their only UK show this year, in support of their *Ende Neu Remes*

album. London Adona, 7 September, 7pm, £11, 0171 434 0403

**Electronoise** The inaugural concert in a monthly series (hosted by Peter Cusack), working the interface of electronics, improv and film and video, features music by Paul Schutte, Andrew Hume and Simon Hopkins, plus Alquiara, Cusack and Max Eastley. Plus films by the artists, and Q'ing by Future Sound Of Positivity, London Spot, 109 Commercial St, E1, 17 September, 8pm, £6/£4, 0171 247 9747

**Matchless Nights** Eddie Prevost's label hosts a series of sessions, also at the Spot (see above), starting with John White's Live Bars, featuring a troupe playing battery driven miniature keyboards, plus The Paul Duermal Trio with Harco Moros (double bass) and Prevost (drums), 25 September, 8pm, £7/£5, 0171 247 9747

**James MacMillan** World premiere of MacMillan's new symphony, *Vigil*, performed by The London Symphony Orchestra. London Barbican, 28 September, 7.30pm, 0171 638 8891

**Moose On Mars + Hololand** Ousekoff's finest Electronica duo add live drums for this short UK visit, plus *Schlammpage* iFX. Randomz project in support. London Originals (16 September), London Camden Crawl (17), London KA (19), tbc

**Odisha's Min Festival** at which Randomz Tools premiere their performance for "cor horn multi spatial piano with garden gnome and snore drum tree sculptures", as well as John Cage's *Water Music*. Other attractions include a workshop performance of Cornelius Cardew's *The Great Learning*, and sets by 100 Voices and Kenny Process team. Huddersfield Lawrence Bishopp Theatre, 12-13 September, 01484 430528

**Evan Parker + Javiera Mancuso** One of the master saxophonist's occasional collaborations with the Newcastle-based sax ensembles, plus DJ Port Authority. London City Integral @ The Spot, 4 September, 8pm, £7/£5, 0171 247 9747

**Rachel's + Rex** A rare visit to these shores by the American Midwestern post-rock string ensemble London Cold Sharp House, 2 Regents Park Road, Camden, NW1, 22 September, tickets from Stargreen 0171 734 0932 or Rough Trade shops

**Reverend** London's excellent contemporary music ensemble elegantly Hobson with their

rendition of Stockhausen's *Kontakte*. Xenakis's *Éclats*, played mostly by new UK composers London Conway Hall, 12 September, 7.30pm, \$8/\$6, 0181 282 6484

**Shakti** Three members of the original global fusion outfit — guitarist John McLaughlin, tabla player Zakir Hussain and gharan player Uday Wanyikar — reunite, joined by Ravi Shankar. Hampstead Church, 14 September, 8pm, \$10/\$8. A national tour follows, taking in Brighton, Richmond (15, with Anoushka), Sam Fay's, Nottingham (16, with Andy & Carl), London (Scratch) (18), and more dates. Tel: 0181 963 0940



STEVIE WISHART

## Club Spaces

**213 Club** Diddy aimed improv with High Metabolism & Brand Quartet, London Library, Stoke Newington Church St, N16, 6 September, 2.15pm, \$4/\$3, 0171 249 7937

**Anoushka Drum** n' space sourced by Talvin Singh from raga, tabla, breakbeats, African rhythms and 90s street music. London Blue Note, Hoxley, 10pm–1am, \$5/\$3, 0171 729 8440

**Defunkt** Brighton's leading club space expands to two floors, and presents Vienna's Patrick Adelaar and Brian Tomlin, previews the forthcoming Spunk Jazz compilation on it, plus DJing from residents Crater Vagel, Nick Spice and Flack. Brighton Escape Club, 11 September, 01273 704610

**Electronic Lounge** Electronic's disparate horizons scan the latest frequencies delivered by DJ's Scanner, Tony Morley and guest The Underdog. London ICA, 2 September, 9pm–1am, \$2/\$0.52, 0171 498 3032

**Irregular** New Manchester night dedicated to erasing noisy, grinding Electronic and, er, old-time volutes, kicking off with Prof Braxburn, David Meadows (Skam) and Matt Ward (Stock, House & Walker)

**Manchester 10 Bar**, 10 Telford Street, 9pm–1.45am, free, info 0161 480 5845

**Kasimir** Kourouk Festival's night with live appearance from Hunter, Jupiter and Joy Osco Kolekita, and DJ Dave Reddington. London Upstairs at the Garage, 13 September, 10pm–2.45am, \$5/\$4, 0171 607 1818

**Mailing Post** The Henry Protonstars are joined this month by Gorsevett, Peggington Brooks (Soyman), Vert, Si Begg and Bubba's Ram (4 September). Runways and Reg (11), Clear DJs with Hidden Agenda and

(24 September), London RPH (25), Birmingham Symphony Hall (26), Southampton Turner Sims Hall (27)

**Silver Apples** The legendary electronic rock pioneers, now reformed, plus guests Windy & Carl, Amp, Azusa Plane, Alpha Stone, World Vortex Arts Lab, Sodor Bazaar and Hood it all on a tour of London Garage (14 September, 4pm, \$8). A national tour follows, taking in Brighton, Richmond (15, with Azusa Plane), Sam Fay's, Nottingham (16, with Windy & Carl), London (Scratch) (18), and more dates. Tel: 0181 963 0940

**Steele** Taking their mobile booth out on the road, for gigs at Leeds, Coventry (25 September), Manchester MOH (26), Nottingham Marcus Garvey (27), Glasgow Garage (28), Newcastle Riverside (29). More dates follow in October

**Stevie Wishart** A night of electronically treated funk, garage, plus kiddy drums and voice at the first of a run of a new contemporary music nights at the North London venue, London Union Chapel, Compton Avenue, N1, 19 September, 8pm \$7/\$5, 0171 226 3750

Olego (18), To Rococo Rot's debut UK performance. London Southfields, 340 Farnham St, EC1, 10pm–2.30am, \$4/\$3, 0171 236 8112

**Metrol Underground** drum 'n' bass, HipHop, Techno, dub, Electronic and jazz, with regular Muro D'us London Clinic, 19 September, 10pm–4am, \$6, 0171 792 5478

**Mukham** Big beat sessions, with guest DJ's Vismir (9 September), and Hild from Clear Records (23). London Clinic, fortnightly Tuesdays, 10pm–3am, \$4/\$3, 0181 560 5133

**Phono** Listen and learn as Gagan plays live, and the Wireless crew spin Ambient, jazz, Electronic, drum 'n' bass, post-rock and to-4 London Koko Bar, 11 St Martin's Court, WC2, 26 September, 7–11pm, free, 0171 420 5626

**PM Scientists** Two rooms of deepest, darkest drum 'n' bass and Techno with regular scientists and guests: Bryan Gee and Kirk Dejongho (3 September), LTJ Buken and Jason Apple (10), Komazzy & Storm and Dave Tepper (17), Or 5 Gacher and Tony Vegas (24), London Southfields, Wednesdays, 10pm–2am, \$5/\$4, 0171 357 0004

**Rumpus Room** Ambient freerides delves into some better matter, plus residents The Henry Protonstars play an eclectic, out-of-the-box to the late William & Burroughs. London Arch No 5, Strand SE 1, 26 September, 10pm–3.30am, \$8/\$6, 0181 923 1922

**Savage Machine** Rocking wilderness from Glasgow's World Vortex Arts Lab and Nuvok (12 September), Rex and Demark's Speaker (16), M1 (19), and To Rococo Rot (26). London Hood & Anchor, Upper Street, N1, Fridays, 8.30pm–1am, \$4/\$3, 0171 354 1443

## Radio

### National

#### BBC Radio 1

**Andy Kershaw** Mondays 8.40–10.30pm World Music from all quarters, folk, roots, reggae and more. **John Peel** Tuesdays 8.40–10.30pm The place to keep up with new rock, indie, Techno, Jungle, Electronic, dub and the legendary sessions

**Ovo in the Jungle** Fridays 10.30pm–midnight. Gaudi DJs provide hour-long broadcasts from **Ante Nightingale** Sundays 4–6pm. Collect eclectic sounds from the apple-clubber

#### BBC Radio 3

**Songs From Saturn** Saturdays 8–7.27pm (6–7.27pm) 4pm. Part aural documentary of the life of Sun Ra including interviews, archive recordings, analysis and more. Presented by Jeff Nelson

**Keweenaw** Mondays 10.45–11.30pm. Andrew Sparrow introduces features of contemporary classics. This month: **Plavati** (Saxons) and **Waxman** (Strawinsky) (15), **Radio 3** also includes **Steele**, **Reich**, **John Lennon** and **Beethoven** (18). History of the Contemporary Music Network (15), masterpieces from **IRCAM** (22), **Tam Johnson** on the New York avant garde (23)

**Heat And Now** Fridays 10–12.30pm Contemporary music magazine, interviews, record reviews, sessions. This month: **Fennelly**, **Carolee**, etc. in concert (15 September), new Australian composition (12), **Graham Fynn**, **Tony Lewis** and more at the Vale of Glamorgan Festival (19), new Scottish music (26)

**Jazz In Concert** **Altogether** Saturdays 10–10.55pm 7pm. Modern instrumentalists recorded live. This month: **The LSCD** (15 September), **John Scofield** and **Fiske Gibbs** (17)

### Regional

#### BBC Derby

**Sonnet** Saturdays 3–5pm. Ashley Franklin plays instrumental Electronic, contemporary classical/jazz music. New Age and Ambient

#### BBC Greater London Radio (GLR)

**Charlie Gillett** Saturdays 10pm. Rock, indie, dub, World Music, blues, R&B and more

#### BBC Lancashire

**On The Wire** Saturdays 12–2am. Steve Barker's seasoned New Music mix: dub, experimental electronic, rock, indie, hip-hop and more

#### BBC Merseyside

**The Late World Noise** Fridays 12.30–2.30am. Out rock, psychedelia, jungle, avant-garde, warped Ambient and global genres in themed sequences

#### CRMK (Melton Keynes)

**The Garden Of Eatin'** Saturdays 7pm–2am. Shane Quinlan's blend of avant rock to electronic, world, with techno soundtracks

#### Kiss 106 FM (London)

**Hot Cats** Wednesdays 10pm–12am. Drum 'n' bass spun by Kenny Ken and DJ Hype

**Give It Up** Wednesdays 2–4am. Specially recorded sessions and in-studio appearances

**Intelligent Drum 'n' Bass** Fridays 12–2am. Fabio and Grooverider mix the jams

**Solid Steel** Sundays 12–1am. Drum-dub mayhem from Collette and the Anal crew

**The Civil Owl Zone** Sundays 5–7pm. Rob Thomas's experimental Ambient, dub and Electronic mix

**Interceptors** Sundays 8pm–midnight. Eclectic soul, jazz, blues, funk and Old School electronic, emceeds from Patrick Forgy and Giles Peterson

#### Kiss 106 FM (Manchester)

**Phil Thompson** weekdays 12am–2am. Fresh live night soundtrack in a mixed-up, syncopate style

**Boi Beats** Thurs 8–10pm. Funk Mondays 8–10pm. Tuff Jungle with KOC and Marcus

**800 State** Fridays midnight–1am. Something for the weekend from the various crew

**Alpha Waves** Saturdays 4–6am. Transmissions, eclectic and isolationist with Skam. James

#### Kiss 106 FM (Yorkshire)

**L Double** Mondays 8–10pm. Drum 'n' bass, artist spins tracks from his bag of new tunes

**Ascher** Sundays 4–6pm. Sean Routh and Rob Brown present Deepstage

#### RTM (South London)

**Sharp As A Needle** Sundays 9.30pm–12am. John Kennedy plays rock, dub, Electronic, experimental Ambient, HipHop, plus live studio sets

### Scratch

New York's Silver Apples play live

plus the Sebout of Marc Clifford's new vocal

project **Scratch**, and **Archie** from **Staradust's**

**Tim Gane**. London Spire, 109 Commercial St,

Et, 18pm–12pm, 7pm–midnight, \$5/\$4,

0171 238 6616

**Soul Station** Sound Bands across the ocean

DJ sets and sessions by **Dusseldorf**, Berlin too

To Rococo Rot, Designer (aka Tortoise

producer Casey Reel), Hip, and QJ, 6 London

ICA, 23 September, 9pm–1am, \$2/\$0.52,

0171 930 3647

**The Sprawl** New venue, new time for this

intimate Electronic gathering, Spring Heat

Jack and **Ronnie & Clyde** make the decks,

**Spaw** regulates 5–6.45pm and **88** Tonic chp

in with more tunes, plus a live soundtrack to a

**Roswell** film. London: Global Cafe, 15 Golden

Square, W1, 11 September, 7.30pm–midnight,

\$3/\$0.53, 0171 700 7569

Soundings items for the October issue should reach us by **Friday 12 September**

# letters

**Write to:** Letters, *The Wire*, 45-46 Poland Street, London W1V 3DF,  
or fax: 0171 287 4767, or e-mail: [the\\_wire@ukonline.co.uk](mailto:the_wire@ukonline.co.uk)

Every letter published wins a FREE CD

## Beats not working

It can be argued that experimentation — no matter how inadmissible and inimical its discourse might be to laymen's ears — and the radical critique and politics it posits are neutralised once the familiar grid of repetitive beats is harnessed to it. 'You at The Wire contend that Techno is more purposeful, valuable and liberating, and ultimately a more valid musical form than academic experimentation. In my opinion Techno is simply reactionary. A bold statement to make, I know, but as I see it, its inherent fear of dislocation, which is the essence and general direction innovation, and hence development in the arts, has taken this century, is naturally conducive to the maintenance of order (as embodied in repetitive beats). Discrepancy motivates normalisation. An ever increasing palette of sounds (flood meers, crackles, etc) does not ensure any true progress, only endless permutations of a basic thematic and structural model.

That is why the music produced by the likes of Cristian Vogel and Panosio, to name two exponents of Intelligent Techno, just doesn't quite cut the mustard. I feel that if they simply did away with the typically chugging chug, they would free the music and themselves as artists in the process. There is nothing reprehensible in beats per se (drum 'n' bass is, after all, incontrovertible evidence to the contrary), only the conservative ideology behind strict symmetry, and the unimaginative way a monolithic, metronomic metre is employed, with the disastrous result of flattening out and emasculating all signs of experimentation. The dismissal of all commercial experimentation by academics is as thoughtless as technoheads' unquestioning veneration of endless repetition — although they did solve Zeno's 'moving immobility' paradox.

**Franckm Pons** Santiago, Chile

## Free to disagree

British improvised music is generally ignored or disdained by the wider media, and I had assumed that *The Wire* was a continuing supporter and advocate of this music. I was therefore disappointed to read David Keenan's review of *Two Playings* by Derek Bailey/John Butcher/Dren Marshall (*The Wire* 162). I've not had a chance to hear this disc, and it may indeed be a poor example of the genre for all I know, but I can't agree with the other comments in the review.

Someone who dismisses Barry Guy as gimmicky (one

of the world's greatest bass virtuosos and lauded by Cecil Taylor) must be missing something somewhere. Anyone who hasn't yet grasped the greatness of Guy, Butcher or John Russell probably never will, but I don't see that they are qualified to pontificate on this music.

British and European improvised music has taken a different direction from American free jazz for a very long time, but Keenan still holds to the outdated belief that anything from the other side of the Atlantic must necessarily be bigger and therefore better than the homegrown variety. UK based musicians too numerous to mention — but here's a few: Eddie Prevost, the late John Stevens, Paul Rutherford, Paul Rogers, George Huxham, Nishikawa Bong's Tshad, John Law, Louis Moholo, etc. — have produced free music that is vital and has a social and political conscience. It's preposterous to suggest that these people have nothing to say.

As for the comments about gardeners and beards, they are not worth me commenting on — when did the guy last go to a gig? With regards to 'gimmicks', it's your magazine that seems keen on whatever new musical fad comes along, but I hope this doesn't mean that you're betraying the vein of British free music that was one of the original inspirations for the magazine. Maybe David Keenan should write about Techno records and somebody else can give us a proper review of *Two Playings*.  
**Mark Goddard** London

## Tweaking the freak

So the Sheld of Tweek, Brian Eno, appears to hate the CD recording process (*The Wire* 161). I didn't hear old Brian base a whole recording career on the tweek, adding a bit more reverb to that snare, looping and running that guitar line backwards? Is the same kind of self loathing, Brian? Another point: are these people playing this music live to air for the radio station? Surely it's recorded. Perhaps this is the key, Brian. Stop tweaking and do something pure. Could you do it without an Oblique Strategy? It might shock us all, and we might say wow Brian, that's great; or then again we might not.

It's too easy to flop somewhere that has the whiff of the exotic and find things that are marvellous. Stop acting like a poisoned pig and enjoy what you have found without kicking everything else to the sideline.  
**Nector McLean** Ennals, Australia

## Plato vs Zappa

Once again I have to ask when is Ben Watson going to stop criticising ECM, and in particular Jan Garbarek, at

every opportunity, even when it is totally unrelated to what he is supposedly writing about (Herbie Hancock & Wayne Shorter's 1+1 CD, *The Wire* 162P). The literary diarrhoea which spills from the typewriter of this spiritually challenged (PC enough for you?) anal retentive spits an otherwise excellent record. The materialist distributhe he continues to spout is intellectually bankrupt. He should read 'The Parable Of The Cave' in Plato's *Republic* and think about it, instead of trying to justify Zappa's bigotry and dreaming about the heady days of Leeds in the early 1980s.

**Neil Horner** Bahrain

## Popp music debate

Regarding David Thompson's criticisms of Markus Popo (*Letters*, *The Wire* 162), I should like to set the record straight. Popo doesn't just 'delegitimize the shape and suggestion of a piece of work to the audience', as Thompson claims. On the contrary, Popo creates the sounds that are to be used by the audience and edits them so that they will fit together, which seems to me a far more challenging task than simply producing an audio CD. Furthermore, the fact that Popo regards remixes as outdated shows that he is aware of their limitations. His open-ended system allows users to produce an infinite number of pieces and modify them over and over again, as opposed to the finished remixes that flood the market today.

**Rahma Khazam** Paris, France

## Tit fit tat

In reply to Dnyar Godre's letter (*The Wire* 162) concerning the lack of women artists and writers in the magazine recently, I would rather *The Wire* excluded me because they think my work is shit than included me in it because I have tits. I have encountered far more positive discrimination than negative, so stop whining and get back to your ironing.  
**Vicki Bennett** (People Like Us) London

**Corrections** Issue 162: In Bates, we incorrectly stated that Christoph Heilmann's brother Andreas Martin founded the Robot label. It is in fact run by Kevin Spencer. In Soundcheck, the distributor for Charly should have been listed as Koch International. Issue 161: In Adrian Sherwood's Invisible Jukebox, Adrian's ressure label is called Pressure Sounds, not Pressure Drop. The 60s reggae cover label referred to should be spek Pama, not Palmer. □



# An extraordinary new album from **Steve Turre**

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## Terre Thaemlitz

Queered pitches

"Donning lace and makeup, I sit before my computer and contemplate," wrote Terre Thaemlitz in his sleeve notes to *Die Roboter Rubato*, released last year on the German Mile Plateaux label. This is not the kind of quote one is accustomed to reading from an experimental electronic composer, but then, Thaemlitz refuses to fit into any formulaic role.

A former New York City DJ with a longstanding interest in electronic music, he produces audio works that exploit the contrasting functions of music as a potent socializing force and a point for subjective release. Though he has been working at the margins of sound manipulation for several years, he's arguably better known for his controversial solo piano adaptations of *Kirshwerk* compositions (collected on *Die Roboter Rubato*), which deconstructed over-familiar melodies and opened up a discourse on the fetishization of the Mensch Machine. And way before chill out rooms opened in New York, Thaemlitz became notorious for his unique intermixing of musical genres and moods.

"I used to DJ New York and North Jersey Deep House in the late 80s and early 90s,"

Thaemlitz tells me during a lengthy e-mail exchange, "at benefits for groups like Act-Up NY and in transgendered

## Arcon 2

The darkside beckons

Noel Ram, aka Leon Mar, aka Arcon 2 is the affable half-Liverpudlian, half-Indian producer and engineer responsible for one of this year's most intriguing drum 'n' bass albums. Called *The Beckoning*, it combines exhilarating darkside apoplexy with assured, if half-bured, melodic touches that draw on Ram's background as a trained musician and aspiring songwriter. Given its apparent commitment to frenetic polyrhythms and distorted renegade loops, it's ironic that Ram's first exposure to Jungle, which came from sharing studio space with the Reinforced Records crew through the classic dark Hardcore period of 1993-94, left him cold.

"I was hearing all the Hardcore noise coming out of their offices," he says, "and it really didn't interest me at the time. What turned me on was later stuff like Internal Affairs, 'Universal Love' by 4 Hero, and [Goldie's] 'Inner City Life,' because it was like, still songs, you know." Despite his initial indifference, Ram quickly came to see drum 'n' bass as a logical progression, a fertile creative area and a fantastic opportunity. "I just got into the whole thing — it was a very exciting time, a couple of years ago and I was just captured by it all. Everybody was saying, it's the next big thing, and I saw an opportunity there to be able to communicate with people. It was song based, with lyrics, but the beats were different — it was refreshing, a good opportunity to make a new start."

The new album owes little to the soul-inflected

sex worker clubs. This was when HIV/AIDS activism was at its peak — when all these diverse and disenfranchised people were coming together to build autonomous and visible communities. Whereas music was previously an experience of isolation, I was determined with house music to find and participate in a real community with similar interests and be happy ever after. The reality, of course, was that I was fired from every job I landed because I refused to play major label records. Ambient clubs started emerging, so that was my entry into the whole Ambient/Electronica music industry. By this time I was a lot more sceptical of the homogenising tendencies of 'communities' — especially since Ambient rooms are often led to the Techno community, which touts melting pot inclusiveness under the guise of universal humanism, with little allowance for real diversity. 'Openness' is not a logical concept. 'Unity' is the imposition of group identity — impositions of identity involve exclusion as much as they do inclusion."

His first full-length release, *Tranquizer*, is one of those rare Ambient records whose vaporous drift of elegant harmony goes way beyond the genre's restrictive definitions, to explore the imperceptible and the



cybersongs that effected his Jungle baptism, and far more to the possibilities opened up by his exploratory approach to engineering. Mostly taped over a four week spell in the winter of 1995-96, *The Beckoning* is a stylish object lesson in the eloquence of noise. The title track, something of a dirge-like anthem in itself, is a case in point.

"I think I just got confused!" he laughs. "Things just started to get darker and darker, the more I got into the engineering side of it. It was like, ah, this is good, what can I do with this loop today, how many effects can you put on a break before you can't listen to it any more? That's how *Arcon 2* evolved, it was very much an experimental thing. The thing about *The Beckoning* was purely, let's chop the beats up in as many different ways as we can and still try to retain a groove." Well, it grooves after a fashion, but you'd have to keep your wits about you to dance to its maelstrom of feedback, high-frequency brass and electric cattle-prod basslines.

Despite the brutal force of the title track, *The Beckoning* is hardly a straightforward collation of dirge-like mash-ups; it bears innumerable subliminal traces of Ram's early musical grounding — evident in both the strikingly organic shape of the record and the smaller details: the gently plucked guitar strings, resonant chimes and curious melodic figures eddying through the currents of noise. "I'm kind of pleased with it as a piece of work," he says, "it's quite listenable. I was trying to make melody out of noise and retain the hooks I've always played music and so when I'm programming I tend to do things from a musician's point of view. The sequencing of the album was obviously contrived and definitely stems from the same thing. If you listen to the great albums, they're not just a mishmash of tracks, there's always a theme and a sound running through

them. I felt that this was a way that I could contribute something to drum 'n' bass, you know I don't think something like this has been done yet."

Tracks like the Hip-hop tempo "Warp 7/9", the positively loathsome "Waszland" and the rollercoasting, electrifying "Zorak" hint at fertile areas for future development — but Ram is undecided where to take the project. Sadly acknowledging the damage that fragmentation and punism have done to the scene, he certainly doesn't see himself as being confined by the rules of drum 'n' bass.

"I found it easy to work within a canvas where anything went — the way that as long as you have your bass and your drums, then anything else can be put in there. You just have to spend lots of time processing sounds and looking for special moments. But although I enjoyed doing it, I think I've kind of exorcised it now. There'd be no point in doing a follow-up album the same, I've got to move on to something else. I think everyone feels a bit like that — drum 'n' bass is so broad and there's so many different branches, it's like it's been segregated, diluted before it became anything. You've only got to tune into your pirate radio stations to see what's going on now, and it's all fucking nasty Garage stuff!"

*Arcon 2*'s days might be numbered, but it's too early to shut the book on Noel Ram's future. Making on the next step, he's clearly got plenty of tantalising ideas. "I'm going through an Indian phase at the moment, getting back to my roots. Indians have a really uplifting vibe about their music and they have great ideas, but when it comes to delivering something cred, nine times out of ten there's something missing. I want to try and act as a kind of filter, and end up producing some weird breakfast Indian psychedelia. I think that would be quite interesting to do." **CHRIS SHARP** *The Beckoning* is out now on Reinforced (through S92)



PHOTO: DEJAY

intangible. Unlike many contemporary Ambient producers who depend heavily on the latest synth sound of analogue synthesizers, Thaumitz's interest in technology has resulted in a strictly digital computer studio set-up. His utilisation of alternative technologies reflects his interest in shifting the boundaries of musical genres and challenging conventional notions of "artistic expression".

Like Oval, Microtona and Eijn (Workshop The Glitch), he exploits the limitations of his software and hardware, processing a lot of the distortions and glitches which arise from digital synthesis.

"In this way, production occurs through processes which seek to recognise and interact with their own limitations — contingencies of circumstance on macro and micro levels (market development versus my own access to such technologies due to economics, education, etc.). The intent is not to say, 'Music is a political force which can change the world' (promoters do that), but to develop audio which can serve as a metaphor for, and accompaniment to, certain materialist and queer strategies of social interaction, which attempt to accommodate for cultural diversity and social contradictions. And as a strategic metaphor,

it never purports to universality or any transcendence of the political implications of its conditions of production, distribution and performance."

Though at ease with the limitations of computers, our e-mail exchange was protracted due to a phlegmatic computer that underwent a minor heart attack.

"Computers, operating systems, software, interfaces — they are all developed through very complex socio-economic relationships which are anything but liberating. 'Virtual' worlds are the most controlled and illusory — hence policed — spaces of all. And any artist which confuses a wide range of parameters for production with increased expressive capability is most likely putting the horse before the cart. Media such as computers do not allow for expressivity. They are the vehicles through which people communicate — and when an artist is ambivalent about their own communicative intentions, throwing them up as universal or humanist contents which can only be exposed through the mediation of computers or other post-industrial devices, then it is the contents of the social conditions which generated their media which dominates and contextualises their actions."

Thaumitz's work consistently questions conventional applications of music toward transcendental escapism. With recent remixes of Seven Souls (Material's legendary collaboration with William Burroughs), The Golden Palominos and Haruomi Hosono, plus a new solo computer project *Mears From An End*, and his first all rhythmic project *GRRL* (a speed-dial through a decade of musical styles), Thaumitz looks set to remain a key figure in the advancement of electronic composition.

"With all this talk of 'Ambient' music's subversion of melody for noise, we're supposed to be anti-spectacle, right? But I will confess that it was a rather cynical reaction to the sudden commercial viability of 'Ambient' music as a spectacle of the anti-spectacle in the early 90s which made me release under my own name rather than something more anonymous."

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## Zusaan Kali Fasteau

### Ecstatic transformations

"All our organs, tissues, cells, molecules and atoms are constantly vibrating," says Zusaan Kali Fasteau, "as are all the 'inanimate' things on this planet, and all the celestial bodies. That is why music can heal and uplift, whereas some kinds of sounds, such as machinery vibrating at seven cycles per second, can actually make you sick. Your sound universe shapes how you feel and how you experience life." Such holistic embraces of music's more mystical powers are often ridiculed as pretentious, unless you happen to be dealing with the genuine article, in which case they resound with the weight of a lifetime spent worshipping sound. Always ahead on the hipster curve, multi-instrumentalist Fasteau has been exploring just about every avenue of enlightenment, musical and otherwise, the world over for more than 25 years. On her recent solo disc, *Sensual Hearing*, she leads a rotating ensemble through 16 startling "spontaneous compositions" whether executing burning soprano sax solos, sonorous cello scrapes, multiphonic vocals, or playing one of her arsenal of guitars. Fasteau fulfills the promise of a pan-cultural, freely improvised "folk music" better than any other exponent of the late 60s/early 70s jazz avant garde.

Raised in New York and Paris by a musical family (including a cellist grandfather who threw musical parties for George and Ira Gershwin when he wasn't woodshedding daily in front of his granddaughter), Fasteau's formative obsession with music — she studied piano, cello, voice and flute — led her initially to the halls of academe. After receiving a BA in

anthropology and an MA in World Music, she reached the conclusion that her studies had been "largely irrelevant to the vibrant intensity of creativity." Forsaking the "sneakiness" of professordom, Fasteau pledged to live a nomadic life utterly dedicated to the performance and creation of music.

Her first stop was the much mythologised NYC free jazz scene of the late 60s/early 70s, where she was exposed to all the trials of that community. Landing in San Francisco in 1971, Fasteau met Donald Rafael Garrett, whose vast contributions to avant garde jazz and gun-till influence on its practitioners constitute a shamefully unsung chapter in the music's history. Garrett co-founded The Experimental Band with Muhal Richard Abrams, and played on Coltrane's *Om* album and the corresponding West Coast Tours. It wasn't long before he and Fasteau had solidified a bond — musically, personally and spiritually — which would carry them across countless cultures over several continents for the next six years. "We nourished each other's concepts of sound, playing music at least nine hours every day for six years," recalls Fasteau. "We played at home, while walking the streets, travelling to gigs, before the gig, after the gig, and of course during the gigs — nonstop music." The spacious acoustic shimmer of their duo performances, under the name *Sue Ensemble*, can be heard on *We Move Together*, recorded for ESP in the early 70s, and on recordings for the Italian Red label. Fasteau also hopes to release some archival *Sue Ensemble* recordings on her own Flying Note label.

As a woman in the boys' club of improvised music, Fasteau has mastered the searing energy language of her male free jazz peers, yet she also offers her own unique take, derived as much from her own femininity as from her immersion in the musics of other cultures. Indeed, she believes, "it is the responsibility of women musicians to create new music from their own centre of energy." Her soprano sax playing, alongside the likes of Daniel Carter, William Parker and Bobby Few on *Sensual Hearing*, and Few and Noah Howard on the recent CMP *Into Date Expatrate Kin*, is every bit as robust as her formidable compatriots. "Western culture is too yang," she complains. "The male aspects of behaviour have dominated, and women have been systematically excluded from making culture. In my music, I balance yin and yang parameters of sound: the point is not to exclude yin or yang; they enhance each other. Contrast, in dynamics, pitch, tone, speed and so on, brings richness to the music and holds the interest of the audience."

Since her return to America in the mid-80s, Fasteau has deliberately opted for a DIY approach to her career, releasing six albums herself via Flying Note, where she is able to control all aspects of production. In fact, self-production seems to be something Fasteau has cultivated quite a passion for, especially the technical possibilities opened up by digital production technologies, something that many improvisers buttfully shun as somehow "impure." "Music technology is approaching the pinnacle of perfection," she says,

## label lore

No. 011

### Shi-Ra-Nui/ Soup Disk



Contact: Shi-Ra-Nui fax: 00 81 425 71 4276

Soup Disk fax: 00 81 3 3770 5726

Distribution: No distributor in UK, Dutch East India Co (USA)

Run by Nij and Hara

Roster includes: Montage (breakbeats jazz).

Cappaback (instrumental HipHop), Nij (Electro B breaks), Masaaki Kikuchi (woodbass), Cubeloop and Circus Lab (Reflection)

Description: Sibling labels offering mostly indescribable Japanese mutations of solarized jazz atmospheres, fragmenting HipHop, breakbeat noir and Improv.

Brief history: Soup founded in 1995, Shi-Ra-Nui in 1996. Sub-label 36D Records — out jazz division — founded in 1997, in 1997 also started Silverstone, Street, Silver World. Other label compiled works by Soup staff. DJ Vadim Presents Broken And Sculptured Sounds' Japan edit. Also, Nij is guest producer of Zero Gravity label.

Statement of intent: Soup presents street jazz breaks, Shi-Ra-Nui presents brooding shadow jazz and altered beats, 36D Records presents out jazz sounds. Silverstone series is jazz documents series. The three labels have original jazz attitude and improvise, support each other.

Other activities: Events. Liberator is presented by Soup, Zero and Shibahara at Shibuya. Jazz breakbeats DJ meets jazz improviser recording every month.

Future plans: First albums by Cappaback, Weedbeats, Computer Soup, Montage second album, albums by Suzuki, Dubsonic, Stanish, Arkestra, DJ Hat-Mony, Ruf-Nek Piano remix album by DJ Vadim, M. Kita, etc. and more.

Choice cut: Various — *Sakayou Q/ Chaos* (Shi-Ra-Nui), Various — *Silverstone* (Soup Disk).

(Info: 6 months ago, Nij)

"and yet in the midst of this wealth of technology, it is still the human expression, the emotive roughness of a voice, the stretched string, wind against wood, the heart's breath, that makes the listener swoon, weep and jump for joy." **AT LEE** *Sensual Hearing* is available from Flying Note (fax 001 914 496 0438). Expatiate Kin is released by CMP (through Impetus).



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# global ear

## Budapest

On the landing of a grand marble staircase, beneath the neo-Gothic vaulting of the Hungarian Culture Foundation in Budapest's Castle District, Félix Lajko is playing a concert. Impresario with him is the bear-like double bass player Attila Lónyai, who rolls and wrestles with his instrument. The barefoot Félix Lajko, by contrast, is pale and interesting in a very East European kind of way. His feet are bare, his back turned to the audience, but he exudes an other-worldly charisma as he plays the fiddle with all the drama the instrument can afford — both in the shapes he throws and in the shifting, sliding, occasionally spine tingling melodies he soars off into.

Félix Lajko is still only in his early 20s, but his music is the most interesting new noise to emerge in post-communist Hungary. It's a unique hybrid of classical influences (he is conservatory-trained), folk roots (the first showed up gigging on the Budapest folk scene in the early 1990s, and still works with folk instrumentation) and jazz (he played for a while with respected Hungarian free jazz saxophonist Drexci, and his current style is as much improvisation as composition). Attracted to its rough cardboard packaging, I picked up his CD *Félix Lajko És Zenekara*, noted the pictures of the weird-looking young violinist within, and took it home to discover a music so passionate as to verge on melodrama. It swoons between joy and melancholy, fusing classical figures and folk melodies with an occasionally ironic assurance reminiscent of interwar Central European cabaret.

Despite being anomalous in almost every respect, it's a music that could only have come from hereabouts. 'Hereabouts', though, is not a simple concept. The Hungarian Culture Foundation promotes work from the Magyar minorities stranded in neighbouring states. Félix Lajko comes from Subotica — just over the border in Vojvodina, the Hungarian-speaking northern part of Serbia. The audience, huddled on the stairs above and below the landing, are mostly concerned middle-class thirtysomethings, serious and conservative.

It suits the atmosphere perfectly when church bells begin ringing from the Matyas templom across

A survey of sounds from around the planet. This month . . .

the square. The musicians, who are working without amplification, slow down and fall silent. The gentle tolling becomes part of the piece. Then Félix Lajko plays a few short phrases, jamming with the bells. Attila Lónyai joins in, thumping the odd bass note, and the music builds back up from there. It's a breathtaking moment, and for the second time in half an hour I find myself moved to the verge of tears.

Back in 1904, while the building Félix Lajko is playing in was being constructed to serve as Finance Ministry, Bela Bartok and Zoltan Kodaly were touring remote regions of what was then Greater Hungary, rooting out folk music from the vanishing rural heritage. Bartok went on to fuse its tonal qualities into his version of orchestral modernism, while Kodaly created an all-embracing music education system based on the songs they had collected. As a result, Hungary is infused with an elemental sense of its national musical heritage. But by the 1970s, folk was being eroded by Communism and Western pop. Young urban musicians followed Bartok and Kodaly out into the country, looking for a new link to rural traditions. Their search led to

Transylvania, now part of Romania, where isolation from most of the 20th century had

preserved the context of ancient music. The revival that ensued integrated folk into a fairly dissonant culture

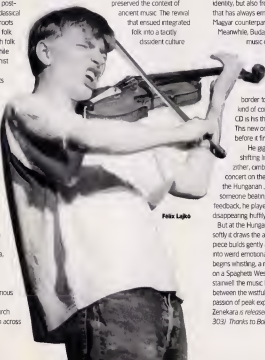
Indeed, folk's lengthy isolation might well be the decisive factor that will help it survive the arrival of capitalism, where Hungary's other dissonant cultures have failed. Its once fertile rock underground has lost the fire of dissonance, while more mainstream acts can't compete with Western imports. Besides, the market is tiny. Sooner or later, all Hungarian acts have to answer the tired old question facing anyone on the periphery of the multi-national mainstream: Act locally and try to sell globally? Or act globally and almost certainly never sell anything but locally? A Hungarian imitation of The Spice Girls, for example (there are in fact two such), is never going to interest anyone abroad. Nevertheless, the Hungarian Spice Girls are more likely to make the local charts than any oddball violinist from Vojvodina.

Of all the groups struggling to make an impact in formerly communist Europe, only Laibach have managed to attract much attention outside of their immediate context. Félix Lajko, growing up in a very different part of ex-Yugoslavia, shares a little of their background. It's typical that the one artist who looks likely to create something both defiantly Hungarian and capable of transcending Hungarian-ness, comes not only from a region where folk traditions still help define identity, but also from a Yugoslav art school tradition that has always embraced the avant garde in ways its Magyar counterpart rarely dared.

Meanwhile, Budapest employees of multinational music companies speak in awe of Félix Lajko. The ferocity of his talent is apparent to all who come across it. But Lajko, by all accounts something of an eccentric, who still occasionally cycles across the border to gigs, is clearly uninterested in any kind of conventional recording career. His latest CD is his third. The other two are unavailable. This new one was expected for about a year before it finally came out.

He gigs often in Budapest, improvising with shifting line-ups that include double bass, zither, ambience and drums. Apart from this concert on the staircase, I've also seen him play at the Hungarian Jazz Festival, accompanied by someone beating a milk churn. Irritated by recurring feedback, he played rapidly and with obvious anger, disappearing huffily onstage after a curt half hour.

But at the Hungarian Culture Foundation he plays so softly it draws the audience in towards him. A final solo piece builds gently around a classical figure, veering off into weird emotional extremes. Towards the end he begins whistling, a melody that wouldn't be out of place on a Spaghetti Western soundtrack. There in the starvel the music hangs in the air, poised somewhere between the wistful nonchalance of routine and the passion of peak experience. **DAVE RIMMER** Félix Lajko És Zenekara is released by Muzsik (tel/fax 00 36 62 312 303). Thanks to Bob Cohen for assistance with this article.



Félix Lajko



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# local hero



A very English voice combines with wholly un-English sentiments in the idiosyncratic songs of **Robert Wyatt**, who is about to break a six-year silence with a brilliant new album.

Words: Biba Kopf, Photography: Michele Turani

"The last record I made under my own name was while there was no elected prime minister," reminisces Robert Wyatt with a slight shudder as he recalls the grey years "John Major was there by default, as it were, so I quickly made a record. When he actually got voted in, I was so depressed at the thought that another generation of English people were prepared to vote for a Conservative government that I went on strike for five years, and now he's gone I have made another record."

Pausing long enough for the listener to weigh up the implications of his one-man art strike, Wyatt leans forward, his face creasing into regularly exercised laughter lines, as he readies himself to toss a banana skin under the oncoming train of thought.

"At least that's what I would like to say, but that's a load of old bollocks!" he guffaws. "I just had a hard time collecting my thoughts throughout the 90s. They seemed to just dissipate."

"But I have to earn a living," Wyatt continues, "so I just collected together scraps of tunes and words, with a lot of help from other people, other people's tunes, Alfie's words, and I found to my surprise that I had enough material for a record."

Fully animated, nothing can stop Robert Wyatt now. He is sitting in the garden of the ramshackle summer dacha he and his wife Alfie (née Althea) bought on the mouth of the Humber river near Cleethorpes, along with a house in Louth, Lincolnshire, with the proceeds from selling their Twickenham flat in the late 1980s. They might be far removed from the heart of things, but their thirst for a righteous fight hasn't diminished. On the way from the train station, Alfie, herself an artist and poet, rejoices in their recent victory over the developers by getting the land around their dacha — one of a colony that used to serve as a holiday retreat for Yorkshire miners — declared a conservation area.

If sunshine and a seaside victory were not enough, Robert Wyatt's excellent new album *Shleep* is just cause for celebration. Recorded at former Roxy Music guitarist Phil Manzanera's studio, it marks Wyatt's return to working with a range of different musicians, rather than trying to do everything himself on what Alfie calls his 50 quid keyboard. You can imagine what a difference a line-up including Brian Eno, Evan Parker, Annie Whitehead, Belgian guitarist Philip Catherine, and, most surprisingly, Paul Weller made, not only to the texture of the music, but also to Wyatt's spirit.

"The people who came in, they really loved me up," enthuses Wyatt, "because when you are on your own, I mean, not in a group, you can get a bit... abstract. You can lose your grip on that physical, visceral thing of making music, that momentum of working with other people. So it wasn't just their contributions that were valuable, it was the psychological effect, for me, of being back among other people."

What with its balance of musical invention and playfulness, song structure and the freedom for players like Parker to extend song form way beyond its usual parameters, and the sharp observation and Lear-like nonsense of its lyrics, *Shleep* reverses the spiral of despair which Wyatt's latter records seemed locked into. Indeed, at its most buoyantly optimistic it is as exuberant as "Love Makes Sweet Music", the very first single he made with Soft Machine some 30 years ago, especially when Wyatt's voice locks into — in his words — his "girly chorus act" with Brian Eno (on "Heaps Of Sheeps"). That same spirit carries through into the affectionate comedy of "The Duchess", featuring Parker's soprano and Eno's

synthesizer. Thereafter, it takes a wistful tumble through a Wyatt/Catherine ballad and a vaguely troubled dream song co-written with former Soft Machine colleague Hugh Hopper. And then Wyatt slays you with the album's masterpiece, a faintly comic, yet heartbreakingly melancholy philosophical meditation called "Free Will And Testament". Over Paul Weller's guitar and slide revamp of the tune (originally written by Mark Kramer), Wyatt opens brilliantly with the lines, "Given free will but



with certain [imitations] cannot will myself to limitless mutations", and concludes with the devastating plea, "Had I been free, I could have chosen not to be me/Demanded forces push me madly round a treadmill! Let me off please, I am so very tired."

The piece heads a canon of great Wyatt songs, among them Soft Machine's "Moon in June," Matching Mole's "Oh Caroline," "Signed Curtain" and "The God Song," the eek's lament of "Dondosjan" and the whole of the *Rock Bottom* album. His voice traces such songs through successive tapestries of psychedelic, experimental, Rock in Opposition, post-punk, agitpop, jazz fange and Electronica musics without ever tugging him away from the path he marked out for himself 30 years ago.

"Any consistency comes from the fact that my brain goes round and round similar preoccupations for years on end," Wyatt remarks in his characteristically self-deprecatory manner. "I nag away at one or two thoughts like Winnie the Pooh, who was, in fact, my earliest role model. That's where any consistency comes from."

Robert Wyatt talks as he sings, just as you would expect of the man who, 30 years ago and then some, introduced the once revolutionary notion of singing it like you talk it, while all around him were mimicking American R&B vocalists. In Soft Machine he drummed and sang the pathological alphabet in the sour-sweet pop counterpoint of a defrocked Canterbury chorboy. Well, who's to know whether he ever really sat in a cathedral pew, but as a prime mover of the Canterbury scene, out of which emerged the pre-Softs group Wilde Flowers, Caravan and Kevin Ayers, Wyatt helped set the tone of a very English kind of psychedelia. And just as his voice — high, keening, sometimes deliberately flattened at the edges to vaguely comic effect or to up the melancholy quotient — refused to disguise its origins, it also expressed a range of emotions and concerns that must be the envy of classically trained countertenors who are invariably confined to freakish roles after rigor mortis set in at Soft Machine, around the time when the thrilling, fuzzed ruting of their lead players started hardening into a bookish cousin to jazz rock. Wyatt was frozen out of the group he founded. All these years later his "exposure" still pains him.

"Well, I think it was Tom Waits who said, I slept through the 60s," ponders Wyatt. "All I can say is, I certainly didn't do that but I envy him a great deal. I mean, for me, the things that came out of it were quite other. My son was born in 1966 so it wasn't a waste of time. Something came out of it. But I find it hard to imagine that I wouldn't have been happier somewhere else, with someone else, as far as the music went."

Punning on the French for Soft Machine he teased his ex-colleagues by naming his next group Matching Mole. With them he produced two albums — the first an erratic masterpiece of pioneering mellotron mood experiments wrapped around a pair of heart-breaking songs, "O Caroline" and "Signed Curtain," and its sequel, *Little Red Record*, an occasionally brilliant mélange of skits, boogie song and racing spaces pieces. He was about to record a third when, in June, 1973, he fell out of a fourth floor window at a party and broke his back. The accident rendered him paraplegic. But straightaway during his stay in hospital he began formulating *Rock Bottom*, the album that launched his solo career proper.

"I don't think I have ever been a group musician really," Wyatt postulates. "Now this sounds sarcastic, but I was liberated by paraplegia from having to be in a group. It was only really since being in a wheelchair that I have had to do to what I feel most comfortable doing, which is doing what I do best: then finding the people most appropriate to the particular tracks. I mean, there was no way I could go on the road

with a group featuring Paul Weller and Evan Parker and Annie Whitehead. I don't have to think like that anymore. There isn't that awful anxiety of having to fit every person to every tune and every tune to every person, because that is your group."

As evidenced by such a statement, humour and pain are never far apart in Wyatt's work. His music is so profoundly affecting because it's very much a direct expression of his feelings at the moment of recording. That's not to say he's the fringe's equivalent of a 70s singer/songwriter opening their veins to a community of damaged souls. On the contrary, the power of Wyatt's art resides in its understatement. So the post-accident *Rock Bottom* registers the shock, the enormity of the life change, the strange, weightless feeling of hospitalisation in submerged, slithering electronic melodies merging with a fuzz of horns over surging currents of percussion. As a drummer the accident forced him to seek more imaginative ways of keeping the music moving than by simply frog-marching it to a hefty bass-drum lock

— thereby bringing it in line with most all late 20th century popular music. Besides, rockbeat has always been anathema to Wyatt's freer musical thinking — a statement borne out by the first-time issue of the British free music unit. The Amazing Band's solitary recording, *Roar*, on which Wyatt drummed "I can safely say with, not pride, but with defiance, that I have never in the end made a rock record in my life," Wyatt proclaims. "If you lean on my rhythm tracks you will always sort of get tripped up somewhere. I just love the ducking and diving of the jazz rhythm section too much. Mind you, I haven't checked back to see."

If *Rock Bottom* was Wyatt's first landmark solo recording, the personal breakthrough happened earlier, on *End Of An Ear*, his first solo album proper, an intriguing experimental drum 'n' voice record produced in 1970 while he was still in Soft Machine. If he felt Soft Machine's hatchet-faced response to their earlier slithering psychedelic orientation was forcing him out of his own group, he wasn't looking to cram *End Of An Ear* with stillborn Soft Machine songs. On the contrary, the record came across like Wyatt was out to prove he could easily outflank their avant garde manoeuvres. Pitched somewhere between Oskar Sala's soundtrack for Hitchcock's *The Birds* and Meredith Monk's vocal compositions, it scats swirls of multitracked vocals over slippery drum and piano-led rhythm figures.

"I learned a lot doing that record," recalls Wyatt. "It was the first time I had ever really gone into the studio and just treated the tape as a canvas upon which to paint. If anything, I have always felt more kinship with painters, like Chagall or Picasso, for example, rather than musicians and composers. That is very dangerous, and a lot of people have made the mistake of thinking that they can translate the visual arts into music."

You have to test it musically, because if you only test it visually, you can come a bit of a cropper. Even so, in my head I still see music

**"I can safely say with, not pride, but with defiance, that I have never made a rock record in my life"**

almost as much as hear it, so just that feeling of treating the tape like a canvas was incredibly exciting and very euphoric, and it also broke my fear and intimidation of keyboard players. There is a sense of discovery which is often the most enjoyable thing in art for me, rather than just the business of manufacturing perfectly constructed objects."

The experience proved invaluable when the time came to record *Rock Bottom*. Even before the accident he found the notion of recording as a simulation of real-time live performance problematic. "As soon as I started singing the drummer would stop playing," quips Wyatt with mock bitterness. "I used to happen all the time. Never could work out why." On *Rock Bottom*, multitracking resolved that problem.



From early Soft Machine through Slapp Happy and on to Steve Beresford's various projects, humour has always been a strong feature of the British avant garde. Often as not it grates horribly, because it comes on like a typically British apology for getting serious. But in Wyatt's case, humour is integral to his being and therefore to his work. It emerges from somewhere deep inside the music, adds a wholly other dimension to it. Besides, who can resist opening Wyatt lines as divertingly daft, yet spot on, theologically speaking, as "What on earth are you doing, God?" from Matching Mole's "God Song"?

"I mean, I am a muddle-up, like lots of people," says Wyatt, getting serious for a moment. "I know I joke that deep down I am shallow, and I think that is right. In fact, one of the funniest things about recording Shleep was that though some of the songs had been written in the depths of despair, to coin a cliché, when I was recording them I never felt happier. So I felt a bit of a fraud by the time I had finished doing it, and in fact it is the most nursery rhyme-y things that most accurately reflect my feeling at the time I was recording."

"What I don't like about Anglophone culture is the relentless pressure to be anti-serious," he continues. "The idea that seriousness is suspect, that if anybody is serious, well, they haven't got laid recently, you know, lighten up, man, and all that stuff. My dad used to say there is nothing more ponderously serious than light music. And there is nothing that can make you more miserable than a series of bright major chords and so on, and that, quite apart from anything else, the desperate attempt to be liked has a very leading effect."

"Well," Wyatt says, "it's not that I believe in seriousness or believe in silliness. I just think you have to not be scared to be true to how you feel, because there is a constant pressure to be cowardly in what you do, which knows no boundaries."

In terms of Wyatt's music, humour is his way of bringing to the bulk of the song the same fluidity and swing of his rhythm tracks. His shifting balance of weight and nonsense recalls the French surrealists' love affair with jazz, embedded in the writings of Jacques Prévert and Boris Vian. Wyatt's courageous commitment to silliness when applicable, in defiance of the more po-faced avant garde orthodoxies, is shared by one of Shleep's unlikelyst guest musicians, Evan Parker. Other than Shleep, Parker's extremely rare song sessions pretty much amount to his appearances with Scott Walker and Vic Reeves.

"I think Evan was Steve Beresford's idea," Wyatt smiles, Beresford being Reeves's musical arranger. "Vic hadn't been told how venerable a character Evan Parker was, and in the middle of one of his long solos, he shouted out, 'Shut it, Parker' and Evan really broke up."

Wyatt knew Parker well enough to feel comfortable asking him to record on Shleep. "I mean, if you are lucky enough to know Evan Parker, and think you can embarrass him into playing on your record, you do, don't you? Can you think of a better saxophone player? I can't." But he did have misgivings about what Parker's sterner followers might feel about him playing on the wonderful nonsense track "The Duchess."

"I know that Evan, like a lot of musicians, is a fairly open-minded listener," explains Wyatt. "I mean, it was Evan who stocked me up on the gaps in my Dorian Winick collection, for example. But people who follow Evan's music follow the philosophy of what he is doing very closely, because it is a very important part of the appreciation of it, and him playing along with me scraping away on Allie's old Polish fiddle I don't think figures in any of these schemes. So I was a bit worried that they would think I had somehow bludgeoned him into doing something, which wasn't

quite the point. I wasn't worried about Evan himself, all he asks is that you are trying to do something and you're not following a formula."

Though Wyatt commands respect from so many corners, he himself is modest to a fault about his own pulling power. But in terms of the music he makes and who he chooses to make it with, it is not so much diffidence as a balance of his own tastes and desires with his ability to get along with the people he asks in to help realise them. "This may be apocryphal, this story," begins Wyatt, by way of illustrating the point, "but I think I heard it from Evan. So I don't think it is too like gossip: it's about Derek Bailey, whom I admire very much. I think it was that bass guitarist, Jaco Pastorius, he said to Derek, 'Oh, that was a nice little bit of playing there', to which Derek said, 'Aw, that chord's been dealt with'."

"Well," he laughs, "I wouldn't really have the confidence to know which chords have and have not been dealt with. I had conversations like that with Mike Mantler [Wyatt



has sung on a number of Mantler recordings, among them 1976's *The Hapless Chid*). He'd say, 'How can people go on using the common chord of a major arpeggio?', and I just blushed deeply, because I think that there is at least two and a half hours of my recordings that are just sustained major arpeggios. I love major chords, I could just go on and on, play C-E-G on an organ and just hold it. I do like the basic alphabet of the common musical language, as much as I like what has been done with it, which is why I have never abandoned it to just become an explorer of new music. So there are a lot of people I would never ask to play on my records, because I know that they would feel uncomfortable with chords that have been dealt with."

It's difficult to think of any other musician who has touched so many bases that are so far apart as Robert Wyatt. Normally you'd need special dispensation from the Pope or some other such higher authority to negotiate the difficult passage from The Monkees — Wyatt had a chart hit in the early 70s with a cover of "I'm A Believer" — to Ultramarine, via Michael Mantler. Even allowing for the diplomatic

immunity that protects Wyatt from the usual name accusations fired at anybody who moves so freely between genres, the mention of Paul Weller's presence on Shleep produces the biggest shock among Wyatt's most faithful admirers: For his part, Wyatt is a longtime fan of both Weller's cussedness and his music, explaining that he got to meet one of his "handful of rock heroes" when Weller was demoing at Phil Manzanera's studio.

"I left him a note saying if you need that kind of old man sound on any old hum vocals, a bit of old gravitas, I am available," Wyatt explains. "And I got a quite a witty note back saying, no, I don't really think I need that, but if you need a bit

of strumming on anything, I'll come along and have a go. He was extremely courteous and helpful and he wasn't going to presume to put the Robert stamp on anything."

"The thing is," he goes on, "people think I want to write Robert Wyatt records, you know, here we go, Jimmy Somerville on valium. When he came in, I was a bit nervous, because I normally work with people I know, and I was also a bit nervous on his behalf, because he might feel that some of the things that I do are a bit on the whimsical side."

As it happens, Weller contributes to two of Shleep's most stunning pieces — the aforementioned "Free Will And Testament" and "Blues In Bob Minor." The latter is a lengthy, linguistic tour de force modelled on Bob Dylan's tongue twisting

**“In the mid-80s I was writing what sounded like mournful love songs. In fact they were vehicles to express my deep hatred of David Owen”**

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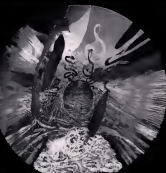
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Under cover of their quickfire wit, Salford sampling duo **Stock, Hausen & Walkman** take potshots at music, low pop or cheesy listening. They are also extremely sharp improvisors. Words: Clive Bell.

# irony in the soul



at anything that moves, be it high art  
Photography: Rowan Seddon-Harvey

"Don't worry, I'm not going to get drunk." Andrew Sharpley, the taller half of Stock, Hausen & Walkman, strides soberly across the pub with what feels to me like his second pint in five minutes. "We did an interview by fax with a German magazine, and the first question was, 'Is your music ironic?' So I answered, 'No'. And the interview said, 'Their music is not ironic.'"

Just the name Stock, Hausen & Walkman indicates you're going to get humour and technology.

"Those traditional Japanese instruments, the sampler and the CD player", as Sharpley puts it. In a recent article in the classical music magazine *Gramophone*, Philip Taghey lined up the Salford/London duo of Sharpley and Matt Wand alongside Negativland, Billy Jenkins, composer John White, Yoshihide Otomo and Yamatsuka Eye as prime contemporary examples of musicians with a finely tuned sense of the ridiculous. But none of these people is simply, or primarily, aiming to be funny. The humour is often a side effect of a subversive creativity, a serious musical agenda that sees no reason to exclude the downright stupid. In the best of their work there are many things going on at once, and the listener's response is complex.

The most recent Stock, Hausen & Walkman release that I have is a 7" single on transparent vinyl called "Buy Me/Sue Me" ("All Tracks By Me"), reads the label copy. Simply playing this record challenges your whole relationship with your record deck: all 42 tracks are locked grooves.

Each one is a sample of

someone singing the word "me", and each one goes round in a loop till you nudge the record arm. It's hilarious, it's imitating, it's a high concept limited edition art object, it's a confident and original piece of music seamlessly welded to a comment on the medium itself, and I don't think *Gramophone* will be reviewing it.



Andrew Sharpley (L)  
and Matt Wand





SHW have performed and released records for about eight years, and have been spared media hysteria, or indeed much media attention at all. "We met a bloke in Salford who thought we were Japanese," says Andrew Sharpley. "He'd somehow read about us in a Japanese brochure as influencing Japanese bands. Then he discovered he was living 800 yards away from us."

Sharpley has now relocated to London, but Matt Wand remains in Salford, near Manchester. When they started out, they were a quartet, producing music which muddled about at the crossroads of plunderphonics, sampladelia, free improvisation and DIY electronics. Wand: "In fact the first gig under the name Stock, Hausen & Walkman was just [guitars] Rex Caswell and myself in a wine bar in Stoke-On-Trent. That was a different kind of music, but strangely it was more like kind of being there now. But the first one with the four piece line-up was at the Tom Allen Centre in East London [in the late 80s]. That was the first time [cello] Dan Weaver had ever played with us. We invited him along because he had a legal looking instrument — the cello looked like it was kosher. Sharpley was playing violin then, I had the tape switchboard on the floor, and percussion and springs, and the steel drum with a contact mic."

This first performance was an exhilarating and highly original racket, with John Zorn-type rapid-fire shifts of direction. The electronics were used differently from other improvisors — unlike the ambience or exploratory feel of Paul Lytton or A.H.M., this was a splatter from loud and barely controlled equipment, and already the plunderphonic element of including other people's recordings was present. The group were quickly recognised as a quality improv act, and were given the Derek Bailey seal of approval with an invitation to play at the 1990 Company Week. I have a recording of this set on which I can hear drum machines doing battle with frenzied claret, vapours off a CD and voices from a TV, but not much of Dan Weaver's cello. "Dan's input was nothing to do with his live playing," says Wand. "He was the master of the sequencer. He was the one who knew about Cubase and samplers — he used to teach it — whereas we knew fuck all. I didn't have an Atari computer to work with till about two years ago. Dan was generating material on sequencers for use with dancers, some of which they couldn't cope with [laughs]. So some of the material came from that."

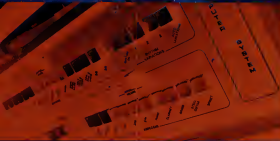
In the past few years Dan Weaver has mainly played live with dance and theatre groups while living in Germany, and Rex Caswell has quit the group, and the

albums, hit the crest of the Easy Listening boom of 1996, and has so far sold around 15,000 copies. This success, although coming five years too late as far as SHW are concerned, means that the label at last has enough money to release a flurry of current projects. This will include a Hot Air sampler, with tracks from all past and planned releases, a second CD by Dummy Run (Sharpley with Nick Birmingham, a follow-up to this year's Little Pink Rocket CD), an Organ Transplants Volume 2, and a new Stock, Hausen & Walkman vinyl LP probably entitled Oh My Bag (after a Japanese supermarket poster addressed to shoppers who have forgotten to recycle their carrier bags).

During our afternoon together, Sharpley and Wand play me about an hour's worth of sketches for Oh My Bag. Later Sharpley apologises profusely for doing this, worrying that he has sabotaged the interview and distracted me from asking the really challenging questions. I immediately feel guilty, as I've really asked them is how come you make this great music? What might these challenging questions be? Sharpley: "In Manchester an American interviewer once asked us, 'When are you guys gonna lay yourselves on the line?' A question which Sharpley clearly considers absurd and unanswerable."

In fact, playing these sketches illuminates the duo's working methods: each brings a partly completed work for the other to interleave with. Wand is fairly depressed about things. "It's been like walking through mud," he says, and "This is one of those pieces that's only two and a half minutes long, but seems one and a half minutes longer than it should be." Sharpley is perky and optimistic, and keeps pointing out how well they've already got with the album. They seem to complement each other well, often by subverting each other's expectations, as you might imagine from the music itself. At one point, Wand tells his colleague "This piece is probably completely irrelevant, but I'll play it because I know you always listen to irrelevant things and go, 'Oh yes, that's all right.'" Whereupon Sharpley pays no attention to the track in question.

"Sometimes there are pieces that you get so mixed with at an early stage that you have to throw it open," says Wand. "All of the germs of things are started individually and then they're interlarded with. You do something and you go, on that's rubbish, but the other person will like it because they don't know where it's come from, but they can see where it might go to." Was this process different when the group was a quartet? "Then, a lot of things were finished individually and collapsed together afterwards. Some of the Blast First pieces [for the label's Deconstruct compilation, on which sampling musicians were invited to nip into the Blast First catalogue] were done



Manchester scene, to live in Salford, London. All these things and gongs have left Sharpley and Wand as the ones who were stubborn enough, in Sharpley's words, to keep the SHW flag flying. Much of their time is devoted to their Hot Air label releases up until this point have been few, but each one highly distinctive in look and (literally) feel — if not the cassette, in a single-portion Rex Crispies packet to the hand-patched leather glove of *Haystacks* from the Venetian Deer CD-ROM to the porno-collage playing cards included with last year's *Organ Transplants*.

This last record, almost entirely collaged from Easy Listening electric organ



individually and then literally just cut together."

Their hands-on, DIY approach extends to the use of older equipment they confess to being torn between wanting to let themselves out with state of the art machinery and not wanting to over-egg their music with the latest sampling and FX gizmos. "It's time to buy some new machinery that we don't know how to manipulate," says Wand, while Sharpley adds "It's really easy to hear that drill outside and quickly record it." Do they feel their older recordings have a naive, "amateur" feel that they're losing with experience? "I still think the same about things I did yesterday," says Sharpley. Wand comments "The problem is that if you



know how to do something, then you have to push it, then just doing it isn't necessarily enough any more you have to go one step further for yourself. All you need is a medium you can save things onto that's reliable, and a sampler with your 16 tracks — it's been that way for a good few years now. You get to know the cycle: familiarity breeds a kind of contempt."

How about the element of satire in the music? "That's gone," says Wand OK, to put it another way, when you started out were you reacting against what was happening in improvised music at the time? Sharpley "I think we were trying to come up with our own alternative, due to dissatisfaction with the model as put before us." Wand "But we hadn't seen that many successful improvising gigs, so we were reacting against the fringe detritus end of improvising. We did see a very good gig down in Clapham, Phil Minton with John Butcher, and Tim Hodgkinson with Ken Hyde."

So you were happy to position yourselves as an improvising group? Sharpley "It wasn't that stage-managed, we were just interested in it and we did it. Improved music is one of the few forms of music in England where the end result can be quite throwaway. Someone like Derek Bailey, who goes out and does gigs night after night, he's not bothered particularly about producing the masterpiece night after night. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. I think both of us found that really attractive, rather than having to produce formed, finished things and present them to a public in a way. But then you have to deal with the problem of playing, which neither of us could really, so we bypassed it by using samples."

Both musicians insist that Stock, Hausen & Walkman are far from unique in their use of technology and satire. Wand "Phil Minton is comedy itself, isn't he?" Sharpley "That was the fantastic thing about seeing those gigs, that I thought Phil Minton was really funny, while the audience were sitting around in fur coats, drinking wine and going mm, mm, while I was posing myself. I was responding to him very directly. Of course, once you've heard a lot of them, you realise that what he does is very serious. Then you begin to listen to the nuances of it and it takes off some of the initial impact."

Matt Wand recreates some of the scary spirit of Phil Minton in close-up, he recalls Minton leaning across the table in an Italian restaurant, gabbling a demented rant about the Queen's garden party in imitation of a psychotic psychiatric patient, while Wand tried to eat his dinner. "He was a psychiatric nurse for a while, and he had stored up all the patients' behaviour. And because it wasn't a gig situation it was all the more disturbing."

In the case of the *Organ Transplants* album, was that intended as a satirical take on the current fascination with cheesy folk music from the 1960s? Sharpley "When I was running a record shop, all the electronic music I was hearing was really tame. There was lots of Ambient soup. People said it was the next big thing, but it seemed incredibly conservative. So I thought, what's the most insanely conservative record in the world? Let's try to make a cross between that and the experimental. It's like dressing in a really straight way, being ultra-conservative on the surface, and trying to slip a few things underneath, that carry question marks with them." Wand "It becomes same after the fact, in a way. You could see the Easy Listening boom coming, and that did give us the impetus to get on with it." Sharpley "But everything we've ever done has been to do with noticing what's going on around us, and trying to absorb it. Whereas other people try to cut themselves off totally. I think it's because we're both fucking art students." Wand "I never went to no bleedin' art school!" Sharpley "In art school they say, look out the window, what's going on around you? Look at the world you live in." Wand "But I was always against that in art school. They always said, do a still life, get some fruit and draw it." Sharpley "*Organ Transplants* is a still life." Wand "I agree with that. It's totally static. But making that record was a joyous process,

because you were sampling from things that were so inherently stupid and happy. I know when it's working because it makes me happy."

Earlier this year Stock, Hausen & Walkman took their show to Japan for half a dozen concerts with Dave Formula, former keyboard player with Magazine. Twice they teamed up with the hip-minded Yoshihide Otomo, virtuoso abuser of turntable and Minidisc. They recall an especially memorable solo by Otomo in Osaka, where he plugged his mixer into itself and played the resultant feedback.

Other recent international SH&W activity includes the Venetian Deer CD-ROM, a collaboration with the German visual team Die Veteranen. The ROM element allows you, among other things, to record your own lyrics to SH&W's music. There are 12 musical pieces, starting with the

excellent "Sleep." A Death Metal sample from Slayer leads into a catchy xylophone riff — a sort of Death Lounge music.

Perhaps surprisingly, the word that comes to mind on hearing recent SH&W music is groovy. Maybe I should say groove-based. It's a kind of subverted HipHop, sometimes employing old funk horn riffs and gritty drum loops. More spacious and self-confident than before, it resists the temptation to interrupt itself and serve off-road into the bushes. There are tracks on the 1995 Harbours CD that pave the way for this approach, particularly "Brake Failure" and "Sniffed Up." You could almost be listening to recent instrumental groove tracks by The Beastie Boys.

Funny I should mention them, because The Beastie Boys have this year become very interested in Stock, Hausen & Walkman. The first contact has resulted in a SH&W remix of Japanese group Buffalo Daughter for Grand Royal (The Beasties' label). Another new SH&W remix is found on Yoshihide Otomo's Ground Zero release, *Configuration/Project: Consume Vol 2*.

Matt Wand has also been spotted DJing at Cybena, an Internet bar in Manchester. "It's very disturbing. The DJ box is in the window, so you feel like a showroom dummy. And you're DJing to people sat at computer screens. I find it quite alienating." Sharpley "When we first started I remember saying to Rex, we should do one set where we just play other people's records. He said that's an insane idea, you keep your bloody arty ideas to yourself! We're here to do music, and that would really piss the audience off. And now it's completely accepted."

So if you guys are so smart, why don't you make a hit record? Do something like Sneaker Pimps, get some dirty old loops, put a singer over it. Instead of replying, Sharpley passes me a large black lump of solid bread. What's this? "It's unpressed vinyl. You might get three singles out of that."

Hi or no hi, the next few months should see the balloon go up, if you will, for the Hot Air label. In addition to everything mentioned above, there's a release by Canadian vinyl-manipulator Martin Tetrault (involving exclusively recordings by an organ and bongos group), a 10" for the Icelandic Fire label called "Empty Box", and a Swiss single featuring tracks called "Stripper" and "Broccoli." Does it feel good to be so busy? "There was this episode of *Teletubbies*," says Sharpley by way of reply, referring to the BBC's cult TV programme for toddlers, "where they said, 'Today the Teletubbies have been very busy.' And what that meant was the Teletubbies jumping up and down going, 'Very busy, very busy, very busy!'" Sharpley bounces around the room "I felt this was possibly applicable to us." □ Hot Air releases are available direct from the label (tel/fax 0161 832 7991), or through these:



"I think I may be their only lasting fan," declared Thomas B. Holmes, writing about Eds New York electronic rock group Silver Apples in his 1995 book *Electronic Music: Experimental Music*. Back then, the Silver Apples' name meant nothing. If they were remembered at all it was as a footnote in the *Savage* story. Succid vocalist Agn Vegg used to cite Silver Apples as a prime influence on their weird folk experiments. Nothing else sounded quite like Silver Apples when they set out as a duo in 1968, playing a stark, yet pulsating and mesmerizing type of rock 'n' roll that pushed far beyond anything that even the most talented psych-rock guitarist was capable of producing at the time. Although the psychedelic era's appetite for experiment inevitably led to groups meddling with electronics (The United States of America, Filly Foot Hose and Lothar And The Hand People being three of the more intriguing sinewave surfing rock outfits) it was Silver Apples alone who, from the beginning, dared abandon all other instrumentation to reach out and capture the sound of tomorrow.

The trouble with being ahead of your time is the decades it takes for the world to catch up. Silver Apples sank amid legal wrangles after only two albums. The experience was so traumatic that their founder, Simeon Cowe, self-same inventor of

This postive, if belated upswing in Cowe's career is only the latest in a series of adventures which began in the early 60s when he left New Orleans at the age of 21 to try and make it as a painter in New York. He was quickly drawn to a local artsy haunt called the Cedar Street Tavern, where other painters, including William De Kooning, Franz Kline, and Philip Guston, jazz musicians and poets, including Leroi Jones aka Amiri Baraka, used to gather. One night he was introduced to composer Howard Clayton and his wife, who promptly dragged him to a bar on Avenue A and 3rd where Sun Ra And His Arkestra were playing. Simeon remembers that Sun Ra was using plenty of electronics the night he saw him. The budding painter/musician was instantly impressed by the power of The Arkestra's performance, even though he wasn't entirely enamored of Ra's social graces.

"Their complete abandonment of existing boundaries had the effect of freeing me from mine," recalls Simeon now. "But I remember once sitting at his table and thinking that he was something of a social phoney. He sat on a music case or something so he could be higher up than everybody else. It was like having an audience with a member of some kind of spaced-out pseudo-royalty. He would issue pronouncements without regard for the conversation taking place. It seemed

# oscillate wildly

their extraordinary ur-electronic instrument, the Simeon, retired from music altogether and went back to painting. But with the 21st century looming ever closer, the time is now for Silver Apples. Today, their self-titled first album and its follow-up *Context* are accepted as classic examples of early oscillator driven rock. The extent of their reach is evidenced by a recent Silver Apples tribute album, *Electronic Evolutions*, featuring 90s versions of the group's songs by such UK and US post-rock and electronic units as Windy & Carl, Third Eye Foundation and Flowchart.

The protagonist of this sudden new surge of interest is Dominic Martin, whose Enraptured label gathered together the various groups' contributions for the tribute album. "I'd been a Silver Apples fan for quite a while," says Martin. "I bought the original LPs on the recommendation of various people and they just blew me away. I later had the idea of putting out a tribute record and, although I'm not a big tributes fan, it really started to take shape quite quickly. Dave Pearce from Flying Saucer Attack put me on to Matt [Elliot] of Third Eye Foundation. Then bands I'd approached for future singles, like Flowchart and Windy & Carl, all suddenly became keen."

The first pressing of *Electronic Evolutions*, originally a 10" mini LP, quickly sold out. The enthusiastic response prompted a full length CD version, this time featuring nine groups. Even more positively, its reception drew Silver Apples' founder Simeon Cowe out of retirement.

"It was at this stage that Simeon got in touch," continues Martin. "He'd stumbled across the 10" in a New York record shop and loved it. I think more than anything, he was taken by the sincerity of the various bands' versions of his songs. It probably came over to him like a breath of fresh air. From there things developed, to the point where he wanted to record again. Luckily for us he remembered Enraptured and so we were able to put out the 'Fractal Flow' 7" together." Indeed, things have been going so well that Cowe has put together a new Silver Apples trio for live and recording dates

like an act to me."

After Ra, Clayton introduced Simeon to electronic composer Hal Rodgers. It was a productive encounter. First, Rodgers composed a piece inspired by one of Simeon's paintings. Then Rodgers showed him the oscillator he had hooked up to his stereo system. It was the first time the young artist had seen an electronic instrument close up. He was so fascinated by the alien sounds it produced that he spent hours goofing around, cooing them from the machine.

"When he invited me to come up to hear his new oscillator I thought he meant oscilloscope," remembers Cowe. "I just thought it would be cool to listen to music and watch the display on the tube. Instead he was messing with this crazy thing and I was instantly fascinated. He laboured intently and in frustration to get his monition right, but what I loved was that you could just sweep around and create energies and textures. I was hooked."

Once Simeon had acquired the instrument from Rodgers, it became known as the 'grandfather oscillator', and would be the foundation of the future Silver Apples sound. Electronic composition might have fired Simeon's imagination (he was aware of

the electronic experiments of both Cage and Stockhausen), but his loyalties were still rock based.

"I have never been particularly attracted to electronic music in its pure or serious form," explains Simeon. "My background in music is mostly rock. When I became interested in electronics it was from the standpoint of its application to a rock expression. I have always thought of Silver Apples as being a kick-ass rock band. We just don't play guitars."



From photographer-folk musician Larry Siegel, Simeon learned basic notation and how to improvise. Siegel introduced his pupil to film maker Rudy Buckhardt, who invited Simeon to compose the sound effects for a Jules Verne-styled spoof movie he was working on called *Shoot The Moon*. That same year (1963) Simeon followed Siegel to a summer camp in Falls Village, Connecticut where he worked as a dish washer. To pass the time he formed a group, The Random Concept. After a couple of years of roadwork they moved to New York, checking in at the Albert Hotel — a popular base for rock groups as the owner allowed them to rehearse in the basement. The Random Concept shared the space with The Cows! Spoonful, Mike Bloomfield and his group, Idle Wind and Frank Zappa's Mothers Of Invention.

"All the talk we got from the other bands was about sex and drugs, hardly anybody ever talked about rock 'n' roll," complains Simeon. "The Albert was party time. This was before Silver Apples, so even Zappa didn't think of me in terms of electronics."

The Random Concept fell apart when the drummer left to join The Commodores. The others returned to Connecticut, leaving Simeon behind to look for work. He eventually got a job as vocalist for The Overland Stage Electric Band, a house band at New York's infamous Cafe Wha? The group would perform cover versions of Doors

hits, which Simeon decided to spice up one night by plugging his oscillator into a spare amp. The resulting blast of electronic feedback did not amuse his fellow musicians. Undeterred by their negative response, Simeon was soon busily (and nervously) wiring more electronics into the group's equipment to produce sounds that were not only alien to most rock audiences, but were, quite literally, shocking.

"Shockwave is that," he says. "I didn't care about the danger. I had been shocked pretty badly, once badly enough to be taken to the hospital, but it didn't kill me so I just figured it was part of the process. I hadn't a clue. I burned up more gear and blew more fuses than I can count."

As Simeon's electronic experiments became wilder, the group began to distance themselves from him. One day they rolled out of town leaving Simeon, his machines and their drummer Danny Taylor behind. Taylor had once played alongside Jim Hendrix, so he wasn't so easily perturbed by unnatural noises. On the contrary Simeon impressed him greatly. They decided to form a duo and named themselves Silver Apples after a line in Yeats's poem "The Wandering Angus" (the same source for electronic composer Morton Subotnick's computer composition *Silver Apples Of The Moon*).

After 30 years of universal neglect, New York's **Silver Apples** are finally getting recognition for their pioneering electronic rock. Words: Edwin Pouncey



Above: Silver Apples, 1997 vintage. Left: Simeon Coax. Far left: Simeon circa 1968

Now with a greater sense of purpose, Simeon began working on a new machine made up of Hal Rodgers's oscillator, connected with two switch-operated oscillators — mounted on plywood so they could be played with the feet — and a table-top keyboard made up of telegraph keys, all of them painted different colors so he could tell them apart in a darkened concert hall (an idea that soon came unworkable when a psychedelic light show was included as part of the venue's ambience). The results were not always satisfactory.

"My methodology was to start with a simple audio generator and feed its output through various found bits of circuitry and see what happened," explains Simeon. "Many times it made more noise than music. One time I got so frustrated with the mess that I hurled the whole thing out of a second-story window where it dangled from its various wires for two weeks. Tourists were taking pictures of it."

Despite these technical problems, Silver Apples managed to get a deal with a small label called Kapp. The duo moved their equipment into a cramped studio and, because the assigned producer never showed up, began recording their debut album by themselves. The reaction they received from the house engineers was a mixture of apathy, mistrust and disbelief.

"I think they were afraid of us," says Simeon. "They were afraid that their association with us, if we were ridiculed, would mean the end of their careers. I must have broken one too many rules that existed back then, when people had a set idea, even agenda, about what rock was. There is more openness now."

Simeon and Danny gained confidence as the session progressed, and soon they were looking to flesh out the record with fresh song ideas. To achieve the sounds for a score to poet Stanley Warren's "Lovefingers," Simeon started work on yet another

ambitious electronic instrument. Much to the embarrassment of its inventor, it became known as the "Simeon." It involved nine extra oscillators packed together and wired into the telegraph keyboard, and a bass foot pedal to produce a shifting chord order. It produced some spectacular results, but it wasn't without problems.

"After the first couple of times playing out it became apparent that it was going to be impossible to do any serious touring with this monstrosity. After a lot of trial-and-error we ended up building it in sections that we could hook together at the venue. In that sense, today's version is no improvement. It's still an awkward bitch to travel with, bulky and fragile."

"The Simeon was always in a state of flux and development," he continues. "I guess there would have been about four Simeons in the past. The one I am playing now has already gone through one metamorphosis, so it's The Simeon Mark VI. When I reformulated the band I was determined that I wasn't going to call it the Simeon anymore. That wasn't my idea in the first place, it was a label hype thing. It isn't in my nature to go around naming things after myself, but I suppose I'm stuck with it."

The first Silver Apples album was released by Kapp in 1968, sporting a striking silver cover upon which two apples had been stenciled in black ink. The music inside described a then unique hybrid of rock dynamics, courtesy of Taylor's tuned drum kit, wayward electronics and poetry supplied by acquaintances of the group. "Oscillations" was issued as a single, and much to everybody's amazement managed to get into Philadelphia's Top Ten. The album's other notable song was "Program," which features an early example of radio sampling, an experiment that, across the water in London, was being duplicated more studiously by AMM guitarist Keith Rowe.

"Sampling was not a known phenomenon at the time," remarks Simeon. "At least not to me anyway, but I felt the need to do more with the song than just perform it straight. I puzzled over it for days, then one day it hit me to do just what the guy in the song is doing, dial a radio from left to right, searching for sounds. We recorded it with

a compilation of samples from several dialing sessions, but when we played it live we just used 'live radios.'"

In the course of a promotional US tour audience reaction ranged from neck-snapping to open-armed acceptance, depending on which state they were playing. In San Francisco they met and stayed with Peppin of The Grateful Dead ("We mostly just stoned and talked about motorcycles together," says Simeon) who helped arrange some free gigs for the group. In late 1968 Simeon and Taylor began working on the second Silver Apples album *Contact* for Kapp (now available on CD from Simeon's Whirlwind label). This time they were given the freedom of a 24-track recording studio with a board that resembled the console of a jet airplane. This was plainly mirrored on the cover of the record, where Simeon and Danny are photographed inside the cockpit of a real Pan Am jet airplane surrounded by dope-smoking ephemera. The back cover is a grainy black and white collage showing the duo sitting among the wreckage of an actual Swedish air disaster, the inference being that these two stoned hippies have headed a jet and crashed it. Real life disaster for the Apples struck, however, when Pan Am threatened to sue for \$100,000. Simeon and Danny decided to lay low. Years later, Simeon is still astonished by the airline's reaction, but remains unrepentant: "I am still not sure I understand what all the fuss was about. Can't anybody take a joke?" he despairs.

Pan Am's toll action was the first nail in the original Silver Apples' coffin. The next blow came when their manager secretly invited a lawyer who advised him to confiscate the group's equipment and hold it against payment of debts the project had incurred. Simeon and Danny got wind of the plot and managed to squabble away The Simeon and Danny's drums at a friend's house. But unable to perform or record without falling foul of the lawsuit, Silver Apples fell apart. Enough material for a third

album had been recorded at New York's Record Plant, but nobody was interested in releasing it. The tapes were eventually lost when the studio closed in 1990.

After finally getting his equipment back, Simeon attempted to relaunch Silver Apples (minus Danny) as a quartet, but after one gig at The Village Gate in 1970 he decided to give up music for painting.

"It took a three-month sailboat trip and a year of selling ice cream from a truck before I could clear out the intensities of the Silver Apples experience. It was another two years after that before I was able to do anything meaningful as an artist. The rock

business can be hell on your eyes," comments Simeon.

For the next 20 years Simeon concentrated solely on art. Then one day at an opening of an exhibition featuring some of his work, he was introduced to Xian Hawkins. The meeting was the charge that jolted Silver Apples back into life.

"Xian was doing sound for one of the bands playing at the opening party. He overheard me mention Silver Apples to one of the musicians and struck up a conversation. I met Michael, our drummer, through Xian. Michael had never heard of Silver Apples, which I thought was kind of cool."

The new Silver Apples have just recorded an album in Chicago with producer Steve Albini. Simeon says: "When word got out that we were going to be performing in Chicago last spring, a friend of his got in touch with me and said I should call Steve when I got there because he was a fan. So I did. We set the date to record. The sessions produced some awesome stuff. We recorded all 12 songs in two intensive days. There is no question that this is the best work Silver Apples has ever done."

After 30 years of neglect, Silver Apples have finally come through. "All the external forces involved were like a crowbar prying my fingers off the paintbrush. There was something cosmic about meeting Xian and having it all open up for me. I couldn't ignore it. Besides, I love music, always have." □ *Silver Apples tour the UK this month; see Soundings for details. For details of the availability of past and future Silver Apples releases, go to their website at [www.silverapples.com](http://www.silverapples.com). Thanks to Phil McMullen for information and assistance with this article.*



Xian Hawkins





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The apocalyptic post-Industrial folk of **Current 93** emerges from David Tibet's vision of an adult world bereft of happiness. In its place he has set up an underground Eden for like-minded artists, musicians and writers. Words: David Keenan. Photography: Tim Kent

"I'm in Walthamstow, East London, with Current 93's David Tibet. We're talking 'puppet theology' 'I was obsessed with Noddy.' Tibet states matter of factly 'I took a load of acid on the top of the house where Rose McDowell [of Strawberry Switchblade] was living and I had a vision of Noddy crunched in the sky and it really impressed me... as you would expect,' he adds, laughing. 'The next day I just went mad for buying Noddy. Before I'd seen him crunched I wasn't any more interested in him than any other kid who's read Noddy as a child. I was taking such a huge amount of speed at the time that I had a massive amount of energy so I just started hovering around and would come back with bin-liners full of anything with Noddy on. Rugs, mugs, jugs, didn't matter, bought it all, to the extent that I started wandering round London wearing a red Noddy hat with a bell on the end. Which was possibly not a good move to make in terms of fashion. I was very keen on Noddy."

This is not what I expected. I'd arrived in Walthamstow this evening with a half-scrawled image in my head of Tibet as some austere and black-draped prophet of apocalypse, an image I'd built up through rated consumption of Current 93's large back catalogue of "nursery rhymes and eschatological imagery." To discover that the creator of the terror-howl depths of such seminal documents as 1984's *Nature Unveiled* and *Dogs Blood Rising* is in fact as funny, amiable and charismatic as his long-term musical sparring partner and closest friend Steven Stapleton (of Nurse With Wound) shouldn't really come as a surprise.

Like Stapleton, Tibet is wary of publicity, worries about being misquoted or misunderstood, or about coming across as "too didactic." He's also fed up with London and contemplating disappearance. When I meet him he's just returned from a three week trip to the States — where Current 93 enjoy a huge and fanatical following — which he undertook to call on Tiny Tim's widow. One of the 20th century's last true troubadours, Tiny Tim was a walking encyclopaedia of popular song, from vaudeville through Broadway to Tin Pan Alley. Having released three Tiny Tim albums on his Durtro label, Tibet remains obsessed with the singer. In fact he seems constantly drawn towards misfits, outsiders and artists who pursue a unique and uncompromising vision, often at the cost of recognition and fame. As such he's quick to evangelise about Tiny. "I miss Tiny so much," he mourns. "One of the most moving and profound people I've ever met. I loved him so much and I was devastated when he died. I was the last person to speak to him on the phone. He said to me, 'You must weather the storm, Tibet.' To me he was the greatest genius of popular song ever. It's tragic that people still perceive him as some kind of one-hit comedy turn."

We're sitting in Tibet's study, on the first floor of an old foliage-draped semi, surrounded by his favourite paintings. Louis Wain's joyous cat sketches take up the whole of one wall, while Charles Sims's beautifully eerie ghost-haunted pieces hang by the window, next to a pair of Tiny Tim's shoes. Books on Christian theology, ghost stories by Vincent O'Sullivan, *Studies Of Death* by St. Sierbick — the homosexual drug addict, alcoholic, late 19th century poet/writer of eerily hallucinogenic works whose posthumous work Tibet publishes through his Durtro book imprint — battle for shelf space amid religious icons, Steven Stapleton artwork and CD overflow. Two

huge, flickering candles illuminate the room as we discuss *Swastikas For Noddy*, the landmark 1986 Current 93 album that saw Tibet shed the last lingering associations with his Industrial past and marked his heading plunge into "apocalyptic folk and menstrual minstrels." In other words, he forsook the back-masked, looped noisescapes of his early work for more directly communicative acoustic music.

"For me," Tibet continues, "Noddy was the total epitome of innocent childhood. What would be the most unusable thing you could give to Noddy for a present? I felt probably *swastikas*. It then became *Swastikas For Grnoddy* on some releases because I started thinking that Noddy was — er, I was taking a lot of speed at the time — that Noddy was in fact a Gnostic icon. This was round about the same time I became interested in Punch and Judy and was seriously thinking that it might be worth... I mean, I probably wasn't well at the time mentally, but I thought it might be good to start worshipping Punch and Judy. I don't know why. Having decided that Noddy is a Gnostic deity, then it's really a small step to thinking that I might as well worship Punch and Judy. Having been obsessed by Christ for so long, and since Noddy had appeared in the sky crucified, and since Christ was God, therefore Noddy was also

God, so he was a Goddy. My mind started going into other ramifications — whole puppet theology."

David Tibet was born in a converted stable ("Couldn't have been any other way," he suggests playfully) in the north of Malaysia in 1960, a place called Batu Gajah (meaning "Stone Elephant") near Ipoh. "I was in Malaysia for about 14 years," he recalls. "I loved it. My childhood in Malaysia was practically perfect and I really miss it a lot. I dream about it a lot, it echoes in my soul always. It reverberates, and as you get older and you lie in bed and you think, the rain sounds like it's the monsoon coming. I was always interested in religion so I used to spend a lot of time in the temples, Buddhist temples, Taoist temples, Hindu temples, I remember all of it."

His parents finally moved back to the UK in 1973 just in time for Tibet to develop a glam rock habit. "I bought *Raw Power* by Iggy and The Stooges when it came out," he explains. "When I was in Malaysia I liked T. Rex and Alice Cooper and then I got to like David Bowie because, like them, he wore make-up, and then I bought [Lou Reed's] *Transformer*. The New York Dolls were wearing a lot of make-up so I bought them. I used to quote like *The Sweet* as well, 'Blockbuster' and 'Heiraiser'. Chicory Tip were hopeless, though."

He continues: "When I went to university in 1978 to Newcastle-Upon-Tyne I liked *The Sex Pistols*, bought 'Anarchy in the UK', and a few years before that I'd started liking Amn Dual 2, mainly because of 'Archangel's Thunderbird'."

Tibet gradually gravitated towards the then nascent industrial scene — specifically groups like Throbbing Gristle, Whitehouse and Nurse With Wound. Such groups transformed their sense of alienation into powerful interrogations of systems of control, be they aesthetic, cultural or political. Their questioning led them down some decidedly bizarre roads, and one of the most useful side products of industrial culture is the vast archives of esoteric and arcane knowledge its participants amassed over the years. For the young Tibet a large part of their appeal was their decidedly anti-rock 'n' roll stance. Non-musicians were beginning to create some of the most extreme (sonic and visual) examples of outsider invention, releasing it themselves in

# CHILDHOOD'S END

limited-edition runs complete with handmade covers. These groups had taken the DIY and democratic art ideas of punk rock and married them to an avant-garde sensibility. Not unnaturally, given its self-inflicted brief to expose the inner processes of the entertainment industry, industrial imagery could be excessively bleak or ugly.

Coming to London ostensibly to study Tibetan — "I was always going on about Tibet, so people started calling me it," Tibet recalls — he became a regular at Throbbing Gristle gigs. He gradually got to know Genesis P. Orridge, who asked him to join his new group Psychic TV once Throbbing Gristle decided to "terminate their mission." He played on the *Therms* 1 album that came free with Psychic TV's debut *Force The Hand Of Chance*, the former being a ritualistic workout on massed Tibetan thighbone trumpets. Increasingly active, Tibet also played with the percussion-heavy, proto-ethnic-Ambient trance outfit 23 Skidoo. But it didn't take long for things to turn sour in Psychic TV's Temple Of Psychic Youth. "I did a tiny bit of recording on their second

album, *Dreams Less Sweet*," explains Tibet, "but I didn't get on with P. Orridge any longer so I left the group to concentrate on my own music. We'd already done the first Current record when I was still in PTV with John Balance [founder of Coil] and Fritz Haarmann from Skidoo, the 'LASH!TAL' 12"."

Released on the LAYLAL label in 1983, "LASH!TAL" is a prototype of the desolate, haunted soundtracks, the "waking dreams," that would define early Current 93: ritual percussion thundering beneath walls of dark, muttering voices and distant toghorns. One fortuitous meeting, however, would change everything.

At the Equinox event I met Steve Stapleton," Tibet recalls, referring to the 1983 festival of industrial culture held at the London Musicians' Collective. "I was introduced by Jordi Valls who had a group called Vagina Dentata Organ. When I met Stapleton we just clicked immediately. I think he's the greatest musical genius of this century and when I first met him I

suddenly thought this will be my closest friend ever, I don't know why. I asked if he'd work on my first album and we started meeting quite regularly, and he also asked me down to the IPS studio in Shepherd's Bush, he had every Friday block-booked, all year. He asked me to come and start recording with him there, which of course I did, and then he asked me if I'd join Nurse With Wound. The first thing I did was *Ostronome 1973* which was a re-working of a side of *MerzBild Schreier* and a side of *To The Quiet Men From A Tiny Girl*. Steven and I got on so well and we did a concert as Dogs Blood Order, doing 'Maldoror Is Dead'."

Although by this time Current 93 were already up and running, John Balance's reluctance to leave Psychic TV made it difficult for the group to perform as such. Instead, Tibet performed twice under the name Dogs Blood Order. "Then a friend of mine was working at the Roundhouse studio and got free time there," Tibet continues. "He was an engineer, and he said, 'Do you want to come in and do an album?' We went in and did the A-side of *Nature Unveiled* as Current. Steve came down along with John Fothergill, who was then in Nurse as well."

*Nature Unveiled* was a landmark release for the British underground, a free-floating assemblage of distant chorales, alien chant and sonic depth charges ascending into a buzzball of static and noise. Inspired by the uncompromising vision of the likes of Stapleton, Tibet created a unique document of all his then current obsessions. His

refusal to reference anything else happening at the time helped define Current 93's future working process. With the help of a floating group of contributors, Tibet set out to create his own hermetic soundworld, which, both musically and in its business practice, operated completely independently of the music industry. In time, he and like-minded individuals like Nurse With Wound and Coil established a worldwide network of fans, who would often be inspired to establish their own musical cells, thereby strengthening and furthering the network's reach.

As Tibet sees it, "Current's music is really, really simple. It began with possibly just one sound that I like for *Nature Unveiled*, 'Maldoror Is Dead' it was a loop of Aleister Crowley saying, 'Om, Om.' I had lyrics and I had, most importantly of all, an idea of the atmosphere I wanted. I described it to Steve as being like a hypnotic dream that sped up as we came to the end of it because at that time I was just so obsessed with the apocalypse, I felt things were just telescoping really quickly, it was all just spiraling

quickly, quickly, which is what 'Maldoror' does. I told Steve this and I played him the loop, told him the lyrics, and I said it has to have the stately slow motion of a dream when it's starting. It's often very slow, people's gestures are like shadow puppets — full of meaning, it seems, but they're not actually doing very much. It's like a shadow thrown by a candle onto the wall, it's distorted, everything is emphasised, exaggerated. By the end it becomes frantic like somebody shuffling or dealing cards. I would say all these sorts of things to Steve and he would do it, he would understand exactly what I wanted."

Stapleton became Current's vital other half and over the course of records like the strange graveyard dream of 1985's *In Menstrual Night*, they took their accidentally evolved working process to the extreme. Then they hit a creative dead end.

"I did an album, *Down*, which I was really ashamed of doing in the sense that it was just so easy to do," Tibet confesses

"It was in the style of *Nature Unveiled*, a long 20 minute piece made up of loops, various sounds coming in, and some sort of structure. I did it so quickly, I just felt I'd become lazy, it wasn't moving me any more, it was simply-made mechanical weirdness. I felt I was moving away from the most important thing, which was the centrality of emotion, of trying to get across what I was feeling. It had become too formalised, I needed to return to what moved me, which was nursery rhymes and folk music. Not folk rock, just really simple unadorned melodies, maybe no choruses, just direct, a minute or two long. So *Swastika For*

**"I started thinking that Noddy was in fact a Gnostic icon. I was taking a lot of speed at the time."**

*Noddy* marked my decision to rethink the way that I expressed the emotions that I felt about the things that were moving me."

Tibet's discovery of Shirley Collins's legendary folk recordings for Topic and Harvest, *The Power Of The True Love Knot, Love Death And The Lady* and, in particular, *Anthems In Eden*, was a major factor in his conversion. "Savage Pencil, Edwin Pouncey, once said to me, 'You should really listen to Shirley Collins.' I didn't know who she was but when I heard her I became completely obsessed, and I realised that she was able to express so much with the minimum of arrangements, not even using her own words, using words that had been sung by 100,000 people. Her direct involvement in the incredibly moving melancholy she was creating made me realise



that it was possible to get that effect across without using loops."

Current 93's engineer David Kenny was also the in-house engineer for Topic Records, and was able to supply Tibet with a contact number for Collins. "I called her up and told her I worshipped her, and I'd like to put out an anthology of her recordings, and perhaps do an interview. She had no idea how influential she was." They got on so well that Tibet invited her to record with Current 93. But since she'd retired from singing she had no confidence in her voice. However, Tibet's persistence eroded her resistance and she duly recorded a talking part on the transitional *Thunder Perfect Mind* album, and went on to sing on *The Stores Are Marching Sadly Home*.

Although superficially a world away from the themes and approaches of Current's previous material, Tibet sees an obvious link between his early music and the subsequent Collins-influenced recordings — specifically his interest in eschatological imagery. "For me, folk music was all about endings and the effect that endings have on our lives. It would be easy to overstate the point and say yes, folk music is the 'working man's apocalypse', or whatever. It's not the case at all, of course, but there was that incredible sense of beautiful melancholy, so moving and so pure, so honest and so human. That's what I really always wanted to express with Current, the importance of our humanity. If we don't have our humanity then we've got nothing. It's all that we have and yet, in that, terrible things happen. And folk expresses that and also a way of coming to terms with that, and seeing beyond it, going on life continues."

**1** 988's *Earth Covers Earth* took Tibet's new found passion further. The package was completed with a beautiful cover photograph of the entire Current 93 'family' (which at that point included Rose McDowell, and Tony Wakeford, then of Sol Invictus). However it wasn't until *Thunder Perfect Mind* (1991) that Tibet felt his music was finally getting across what he wanted to say.

"With *Thunder Perfect Mind* I started writing about friends of mine, about how I felt about things, and then with *Of Rune Or Some Blazing Storm* it became a specifically autobiographical record. I think Current became a lot purer for me. It's also because I met Michael Cashmore (who also plays in his own group, Nature And Organisation) who was able, unfailingly, to enunciate musically on the guitar exactly what I wanted to say. So between Steve and him they were both able in their respective areas of expertise to come up with what I was wanting to get across. It all worked seamlessly. Since then I feel the music's become better and better and also, equally important for me, more and more simple. Something I always liked was simplicity and space, and I think Current's work has become more and more aligned to what I wanted it to be at the beginning. When I was younger the music that moved me so much was people like The Ronettes or Peggy March, early liturgical music and so on. I always felt that I wanted to make music that would move others as much as the music that I loved moved me."

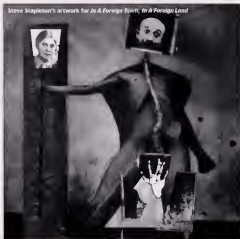
That music really began to emerge with last year's genre-defying *Inmost Light* trilogy, where *The Long Shadowed Fall*, *The Stores Are Marching Sadly Home* and, in particular, *All The Pretty Little Horses*. With contributions from Shirley Collins and Nick Cave, who had been introduced to Tibet by a mutual friend, Geoffrey Cox-Doree, the latter album represents a devastatingly moving and sometimes upsetting synthesis of Tibet's obsessions. Built round the traditional children's song of the same title, the tiny bells and spectral guitars on *Pretty Little Horses* ring out like a testament to childhood lost forever, while Tibet's heartfelt voice speaks from beneath Stapleton's collage of

doctored voices, haunted choral loops and random electronics.

"All *The Pretty Little Horses* is definitely my favourite," sighs Tibet. "I think I'm so interested in childhood because when I was a child was the last time I was ever happy. As we get older and we become more and more unhappy, and as we see more and more the terrible state of the world and the terrible things it does to us, and that we also do back to it, that childhood becomes more and more perfect. In itself it isn't so, but the experience of The Japanese have this phrase, 'Mono No Aware', and the Tibetans say, 'khor ba'i nyes drags', which means 'the Sadness of Things', that this life is not as it should be and we know that's the case and so we desperately try and find a time when the world was as we pictured it as a child, full of marvels, mysteries, full of wonder, full of joy and immortality. I think one of the most important things about humans and about humanity, therefore, is that we carry within us a belief in redemption, that we can redeem ourselves somehow, and I think, harking back to the

innocence of childhood, there's one way that we start to do that. For myself, when I think back to a girlfriend that I used to go out with, in 1980 or whatever, now I think about her with incredible longing and love and think how perfect it was. But of course the reality wasn't like that at all, which is why we split up. So we part the past in a way that appeals to our sense of recovering the paradise that we've lost."

We talk of future plans, of the new Current 93 collaboration with the macabre American novelist Thomas Ligotti, whom Tibet considers to be "the greatest living writer". After stumbling across Ligotti's first short story collection, Tibet became an obsessive fan of the writer's "terrible vision" which combines gruesome HP Lovecraft-like imagery with a Kafkaesque sense of the bizarre. A working relationship grew out of the correspondence they established, resulting in the *In A Foreign Land* project. This release consists of a beautiful cloth-bound book by Ligotti (published by Durtro) and a Current 93



disc that somewhat ironically, given its line-up of Tibet, Stapleton, Christoph Heemann and Shirley Collins, marks a slight return to the earlier space-throb pieces. All tone pulse and treated electronics, Stapleton and Heemann here provide minimal Krautrock-inspired backdrops for Tibet's and Collins's occasional interjections of text. "I think the Ligotti CD is absolutely wonderful," states Tibet unashamedly. "The next album we've started on already. It's very simple, very spacious, more of a follow on from *All The Pretty Little Horses*. Hopefully it'll be out in February/March." Also forthcoming early next year is a book of Tibet's lyrics, and a record with Steven Stapleton and Shirley Collins is promised.

It's getting late and Tibet sees me to the door. Outside, silence reigns in the moonlit street. "What permeates life completely, I believe, is The Inmost Light," Tibet concludes. "The secret glory, this is whatever you want to call it, the presence of Christ in everything. It is there and if we don't find it before we die then we're doomed. We must find it, we must, it's the only thing we've made for, to try and get even just a glimpse of the glory that lies behind everything that's hidden from us. The world seems to be disappointing and full of suffering, because we just can't see what's shining behind it all. And it's the only thing which is important. Although there is that incredible transcendence at the same time — although that's a reason for great joy and a feeling that there is something, there is more than just this — at the same time if we miss the chance to get it, that's it: we don't get second chances." □ Current 93 releases are distributed by World Serpent



You can't tell that to a Hawaiian monarchist, and there are numbers of them. Gabby is undeniably strong. I'm just saying that I like to hear the music less layered. It's an interesting thing about Hawaiian music, and it's something that Ry understands. It's like C&W, the cadence of these tunes. In these pre-missionary forms, when the people were building the words, they weren't necessarily thinking that everything was in 4/4, and isn't it cool? Like in C&W, where they put in an extra beat or two, just to say something. By the way, why did you pick that particular cut?

**I've always loved the string arrangement that surfaces at the end. It's like a kid trying to jump more stars with each successive sound.**

I'm not knocking strings. I like strings, that's different. They're so transparent, no matter what you do with them. It's easy to separate the strings out, and those were very imaginative. It's a diamond, that one.

## RAKOTOZAFY

**"Samsy Faly" from *Valhalla Madagascarc* (Ocarina)**

This is from Madagascarc, right? This is in a different realm of music than what we've listened to so far. This is transcendental, an absolutely flawless musical construction. It's incredible. This is an important artist, isn't he? He should be encouraged in any way possible.

**Too late, I'm afraid. He's been dead for some time. Legend has it that he cuffed his son during practice for missing a beat, and killed him inadvertently, which led to his own demise.**

Oh dear. That must have killed him [Pauses]. You notice that the mode is hypomixolydian, that's what's been played here. The whole piece is an unprepared suspension, it starts in suspension and continues in suspension. It resolves in suspense until the very last note. Isn't it great? It's amazing! I never would have known that. The guy's filled with surprise and great intimacy. To tell the truth, he's calling from the grave. This is a great record. I haven't heard anything from Madagascarc which is on this level of performance.

**There are a great many valhalla players, and I think they're all in awe of him.**

My favourite songs have come from the 30s in Madagascarc. I don't know why that was, maybe it was an age of discovery. Some cultural import, that they'd had just long enough to deal with things global, to maintain a musical stamp of their reaction to the world beyond, and I like that. I love the harp. I don't go to heaven when I hear it, I stay in heaven when I hear the harp. The intimacy and the power of it, [sotto voce] it raises the Druid marrow in my bones.

## FRANZ WAXMAN

**"Adventures Of Don Juan" from *50 Years Of Film Music* (Warner Bros)**

Komrad! It's Max Steiner. Beautiful. Samuel Barber, take a walk. That was brave, the interval of the second that he used finally as a modulating device. You know, you don't know whether to laugh or cry with this music. I think I've stopped caring whether to or not. I don't sneer at stuff as easily as I used to. This is potentially sneerable stuff.

because, well, it's terribly derivative. Max Steiner osmoted [sic] everything that he needed to from his European experience. The music had to be bombastic. It had to be bigger than a theatre organ, so that it could be deemed progressive. Had to be bigger. Forte had to be loud.

People tend to think of orchestration as a separate function, no doubt due to the current rapidity of film scoring, but you can always tell who works hard. This is what Randy Newman's uncle [Alfred Newman, composer of over 250 film scores] used to call 'the bloodsheet', because it would indicate this. Very hard, to do a nice neat little bloodsheet.



## JEFF BUCKLEY

**"Last Goodbye" from *Groce* (Columbia)**

Why should this sound familiar?

**It's Jeff Buckley, Tim's son. [Of Buckley's recent death]**

Well that's a goddamned shame, isn't it? Jim Keltner asked me to write an arrangement for him, and for some reason I couldn't do it. I wanted to, because I knew his dad [Parks] played keyboards on Tim Buckley's self-titled debut album on Elektra. Tim used to come over to my house all the time. We were pals, but he got strange. He was awesome, then he went from being totally immediate and available and communicative to being guarded and dark and unavailable. Tim got into heroin, which I never understood, and then he died. And the kid he had just died. Which makes someone both a widow and a bereaved mother. Double whammy. Very, very talented. Jeff Buckley. A sad story, a great record. Well produced, too.

## MARTIN DENNY

**"Exotica" from *Forbidden Island* (Scamp reissue)**

[Upon hearing first bird call] Is that Chico Guerra? This is the "Quiet Village" guy.

**Yes, Martin Denny.**

His percussionists used to make all these bird noises. Chico Guerra and Augie Colon. Isn't that funny? The one guy who was an exception to this trend of de-racialising global music was Milt Holland, the percussionist, who had negative commercial impact. He didn't make what anthropologists call a man-use day. He didn't leave a print on the sand. He was so genteel, so kind. He had more exotic percussion in his kit than anybody.

**Holland's exotica-styled solo album has been reissued, a result of the recent lounge thing.**

What do you mean, 'the lounge thing'?

**You know, ersatz tropical music made in the late 50s, that's back in vogue now. Music for bachelors with loads of disposable income and big barbecues in their backyards.**

Oh, stereotypes. [Gires] Are you old enough to have heard the first train move from right to left? I remember that moment, Martin Denny, that's a fine piece of work. [Looks at booklet] There's Augie Colon and oh my God, there's Julius Wechter.

**He went from there to The Baja Marimba Band.**

He's playing gamelan gongs on this one. And look who's the producer! Simon Waronker [father of Parks's executive producer, Lennox Waronker].

## ASHA BHOSLE

**"Yuh Na Th" from *WOMAD Talking Book Vol 4***

**An Introduction To Asia 1 (WOMAD)**

[Upon hearing first string section glissando] Round up the usual suspects! I'll take this record, thanks. Is that a shawm?

**A shehnai. Same family, a double reed.**

This is Indian, right? I want this one, this is great. There's not one false move in the whole deliberation. A high level of musicianship, and because it is — and that is no burden to it, because it's passionate music — it's absolutely winsome. I just love it.

**I played it for you because of the arrangement that you did on the San Phillips record ["Baby I Can't Please You" from *Moribus & Böhms*].**

With the portamento strings [sings part]. Yeah, but [Bhosle's arrangement] was precise. To write this stuff down, to understand it. I want to account for every second. I want to account for every move from top to bottom. I have an obsession. Music for me, at its best, is like a crossword puzzle or a Chinese box. It builds up under scrutiny. That's why I like this so much, there's architectural perfection here. The percussion is so precisely tuned, everyone plays in accord — when they want to. It almost makes the strings unnecessary. She delivers the song, she's born in the knowledge, and cultivated in it. An incredible woman. Pure sex, absolutely sensual, erotic experience and highly cerebral and delicate, too. Everything that would have flattered to me when I had a body [laughs].

## LORD KITCHENER

**"My Pussie" from *Klassik Kitchener Vol Two* (Ice)**

The golden age! The greatest melodeur of our time. Here's the residual from the big band era, which the Trinidadians used to great advantage. I worked with Mighty Sparrow, who once posed as Kitchener's arch-enemy, and for whom Andy Wickham and I produced a project [Hot And Sweet, released in 1973 on Warner Bros] of this intricacy in a day in Miami, during a hurricane! But Sparrow didn't achieve the dignity that this guy did. Lord Kitchener is a great character. The British put a hummingbird touch on every one of their colonies and today, of course, even with the return of Hong Kong, the sun still sets on that empire. But this place, Trinidad, really derived so much from the British. I hear palm court music in this and I hear the 19th century. This is the great stuff. I just love him. These gentlemen, they just tap at the beginning [demonstrates] and everyone comes in perfectly! Brings back a lot of memories, this does. I met Kitchener repeatedly. I went into his good graces. I knew all the Trinidadians in LA at one time, and they fed me when I was poor. This is my favourite music, though I've neglected it of late, probably because they've electrified it. I prefer the acoustic version. Kitchener, for my money, is as good as Schubert. □

On several occasions during the 60s and 70s, the writer and photographer Val Wilmer was granted access to the inner circle of **Sun Ra** and his Arkestra, where she was witness to his philosophy, music making, and everyday life. In this intimate portrait, part one in this month's two-part Sun Ra special, she spools through her memories of one of music's true enigmas





# in the house of RA

The first time I heard Sun Ra play was in private. I was in New York, taking a second bite at the Apple, but whereas on my first visit I'd hung out with musicians who'd played with King Oliver and Charlie Parker, now, my connections informed me, the New Thing was what was happening, and the musicians who were really doing it were recording for the ESP-Disk label. A visit to Bernard Stollman, the New York lawyer who started the company, secured a batch of classic recordings and introduced me to, among others, Albert Ayler, Milford Graves, Sunny Murray and *The Heliocentric Worlds Of Sun Ra*. The constantly changing moods of the music on this last record, the contrasts of instruments, register and texture, the instrumentation piccolos, trombones, the bass and tenors duet between Ronnie Boykins and John Johnson, and the excursions into the arena of free improvisation: all this was an extraordinary listening debut. Nevertheless, it was with only the faintest idea of what he was about that I called up Mr. Ra and made my way across town to Arkestra Central control.

1965 was the start of the Summer of Love for most of my peers, but as a dyed-in-the-wool jazzster who had booked straight for the Vanguard and Birdland rather than the Fillmore East, I barely knew where the Lower East Side was. But I was learning. African and Eastern-style clothing had yet to make much of an impact, even in the Village, and although en route to Sun Ra's I passed a few hippies and head shops, when I ran into saxophonist Noah Howard, another ESP artist, he was dressed in a sober New Orleans suit.

Marshall Allen was different. The first Arkestra member I laid eyes on, he'd been out doing the shopping, but unlike other neighbourhood denizens with their brown paper bags clutched in their arms, a hint of something glittering and glamorous showed beneath the checked sports jacket he wore, despite the mid-morning heat. With his fairish curls tumbling over a figured red headtie, he looked like a Mexican bandito. As he skipped up the steps of the decaying brownstone at 48 East Third Street, I followed closely behind.



Just stepping into the first floor apartment was a culture shock for someone who had grown up in South London. Keyboards and drum kit dominated the front room; unusual stringed instruments hung suspended from walls or jutting out at angles, making mobility difficult and filling every available space. Parachute silk covered the hallway, there were crystal balls, pyramids and mysterious long objects filled with light. The lampshades were home made, from paper, and everywhere incense was burning. Above it all a huge plastic canopy, illuminated from within, stretched across the ceiling, keeping crumbling plaster at bay and shedding a crimson glow over Sun Ra himself, who greeted me swathed in royal blue woolen material checked over in black. A pleated turban perched on his head, with a ten-pointed star glinting metallically from its centre.

Our interview began in the usual way with me asking when and where he was born. Right away I ran into his lifelong obfuscation. Like Father Divine, Elijah Muhammad and

other African-Americans who discarded their 'slave-names', Sun Ra felt that by obscuring the early years of his life he could attract more attention for his goal of racial uplift and a wider understanding of his philosophy. At the same time he had hit on a method for keeping fear of death at bay. "I'm dealing with a philosophy of mathematical equations that's trying to eliminate the idea of people being born, because if they're not born, they can't possibly die," he told me, without batting an eyelid. I searched for a handhold into the familiar. I knew he'd worked with Fletcher Henderson, the inventor of swing, telling me about that. "I've always played the same type of thing chordwise and thoughtwise, but playing those chords with Fletcher, I had trouble out of the band. They didn't understand it, so finally I quit. But Fletcher wouldn't hire another piano player and I thought, well, since he plays piano himself, he knows what I'm doing. And so I came back.

"But a lot of musicians are backward, you'd be surprised. The band said they could play anything because they'd played music by the best arrangers in the land, but when I came back with arrangements on 'I Should Care' and 'Dear Old Southland', they tried for two hours and they couldn't play it. It was subtle." He brushed his fingers over his 'sun-harp', an elegant construction of brass wands welded into a star-shape and made for him by an admirer, and smiled benignly at the memory.

A plumpish man — in his mid-forties, I guessed — he spoke softly with a slight Southern drawl that called to mind the speech of blues musicians such as Memphis Slim and Roosevelt Sykes, whom I'd got to know on their recent visits to England. Back then, I had no other frame of reference, probably no bad thing because it enabled me to begin seeing him as a Southerner rather than Northern city-slicker, wise to the ways of New York. The truth was that I was quite unprepared for everything he was saying, the explanations of how his music was organised, the way he trained the Arkestra members, let alone the intricate philosophy and beliefs he espoused. In the course of the interview we discussed the polyrhythmic character of his music: he had already begun using more than one drummer and he talked of the 'multi-layering' of rhythms, contrasting his methodology to the 4/4 beat of conventional jazz — and he talked about the imminent arrival of flying saucers. He was, he said, "number one candidate" for a trip into space. "I'm actually painting pictures of infinity with my music and that's why a lot of people can't understand it," he explained. "But if they'd listen to this and to other types of music, they'll find that mine has something else in it, something from another world."

What else did we talk about that day? Does it matter? I no longer have the tape and forgot what he said while we were taking photographs and chatting. That "pictures of infinity" statement would be oft-quoted and became the title of a subsequent album. The peace I wrote up from our conversation, along with other interviews I did with Albert Ayler, Milford Graves and Sunny Murray, enabled me to debut as a feature writer for *Melody Maker*, then a serious musical paper. Looking back on what I wrote at the time and reviewing my memories of

John Gilmore

**"He talked about the imminent arrival of flying saucers. He was, he said, number one candidate for a trip into space"**

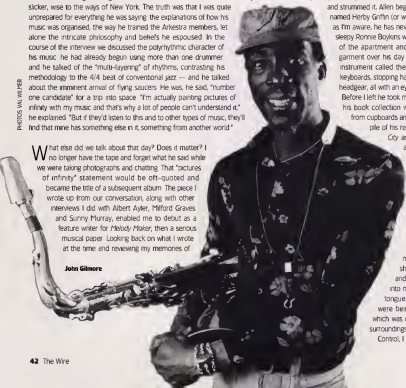
the day, I realise that meeting with Sunny (as Sun Ra was also known) paved the way for a greater understanding of countless aspects of African-American life. It certainly prepared me for subsequent encounters with music, musicians and philosophies of which I'd never dreamed. But at the time I was a little nonplussed and unable to come to terms with a tongue-in-cheek commentary in which Saturn and the pyramids featured heavily. I approached the *MM* story in the somewhat facetious manner I felt that a popular publication required, but my less than respectful attitude also reflected my dubiousness about his identification with ancient Egypt and its role in the origin of African-Americans and the entire human race (I had yet to read Cheik Anta Diop, the Senegalese author of *The African Origins Of Civilisation*).

Sun Ra, it must be said, deliberately sought to confuse his questioners in order to retain the upper hand in what he (rightly) perceived as a treacherous world. My excuse for my own lack of understanding and empathy on our first meeting was that, culturally speaking, I was still wet behind the ears. Nevertheless, the continuing failure of respect on the part of other commentators who should have known better would hamper serious analysis of his work and ideas throughout his life and beyond. When he told me his main ambition was to play a concert in front of the Sphinx, no one could have dreamed that this would one day be realised. Back then Sun Ra was an underground legend and my main reason for wanting to meet him was an awareness that his dedication and staying power had earned him the approbation of other musicians whom I admired.

When our talk was over, Sunny summoned Marshall Allen and John Gilmore to participate in a photo session. Gilmore picked up a Chinese stringed instrument and strummed it, Allen began playing oboe, accompanied by a drummer named Herby Griffin (or was his name Herby Stewart? Either way, as far as I'm aware, he has never figured in any Sun Ra personnel listing). A sleepy Ronnie Boykins was summoned from somewhere in the depths of the apartment and instructed to pull a spangled daisies-like garment over his day clothes and bow a few notes on a stringed instrument called the dunny. Sunny himself played on one of his keyboards, stopping halfway through to don a shiny tunic and switch headgear, all with an eye to publicity.

Before I left he took me into the back room of the apartment where his book collection was housed. Volumes old and new tumbled from cupboards and lay stacked against the walls. He gave me a pile of his recent Saturn releases, among them *The Magic City* and *Fate In A Pleasant Mood*. Then, almost as an afterthought, pulled a book off the shelf for my edification. It was a well-worn copy of *Sex And Race* by Jamaican journalist JA Rogers. Eventually this would become available as a three volume exposition, but in the 1960s the original edition acquired fabled status where many black American intellectuals were concerned. Sun Ra suggested that because Rogers had traced the African descent of several European royal families his book might well remain a close-guarded secret. He showed me pamphlets and poetry he'd written and thrust an order form for more Saturn albums into my hand. All of this was done in the secretive, tongue-in-cheek manner that made you feel you were being uniquely drawn into his confidence, but which was one of the means by which he controlled his surroundings.

Control, I soon learned, was the name of his game. Not



only did he use it to retain the autonomy necessary for a black man to operate in what for most of his life he'd experienced as a segregated society, but by keeping a tight rein on his musicians, many of whom lived with him in the Sun Studio, he could play his music at any time of the day or night, for as long as and whenever he wanted. He laid down a strict code of behaviour. Arkestra members soon learned to avoid drugs and alcohol, and intimate human relationships. He did recognise the existence of some established marriages but, for others, sexual relationships were rare, only conducted with his permission. There were times when a spouse was allowed to accompany "her" musician to the gig, but casual women friends brought to the house were discouraged and could even be insulted if Sunny thought they might be responsible for distracting a man from his higher goals. Not surprisingly, many musicians were not prepared to submit to this degree of control and, as I discovered later, even his most faithful acolytes were known to rebel. But it was only when a friend of mine started going out with his favourite drummer that I learned all I needed to know about Sunny's misogyny. Given all this, I suppose it always surprised me that he should show me such courtesy and friendship. However, apart from the fact that I was the first English person to interview him, perhaps even the first from Europe, he did seem, quite genuinely, to like me.

In 1968 Marshall Allen's father offered The Arkestra use of a house in Philadelphia, a move they welcomed, while continuing to play for the most part in New York City. I began to

spend increasingly more time in New York around the period they were appearing regularly at Slug's Saloon, a sidewalk-on-the-floor joint on East Third Street, a few blocks from where they were living when

we first met. On Mondays, traditionally musicians' night off in the city's jazz clubs, a motley crew of aficionados gathered at this funky neighbourhood bar, primed to dig stories from Outer Space. Located between Avenues C and D in what became known as Alphabet City, and with no local subway, it was hard to get cab drivers to go there. It was, in short, a "dangerous" area for outsiders — just how dangerous was made clear to me by saxophonist Dewey Redman. Leaving the bar one night he was stopped by a thug who demanded his horn, he gave it up without a word of protest. But Slug's was a vital nurturing ground for the new music, and if you wanted to know what was happening, you had to be there. Every Monday in September 1972 I'd trek across the Village on foot to listen to The Arkestra who often played in near-darkness. With the only light source the torches attached to their headgear, they'd stroll up and down in the brick-walled bar, singing to the beat of James Jackson and John Gilmore at the drums. It was a magical experience, food for the soul. Physically, I



**"I'm painting pictures of infinity with my music and that's why a lot of people can't understand it. But my music has something else in it, something from another world"**



remained unscathed — although my heart did miss more than one beat the night I saw someone robbed at knife-point in front of me.

Despite the increasing recognition for Sunny's music, The Arkestra's living conditions stayed spartan. But Philadelphia offered more space than the Lower East Side, and those musicians such as Gilmore and Allen who lived in the commune appeared resigned to continuing to trek into Manhattan. They'd drive or take a train, becoming a regular sight to Amtrak's early morning commuters. Sunny, whose ability to survive on catnaps was legendary, thought nothing of ending a five-hour set at four in the morning, waiting outside Slug's while right-hand man Richard Wilkinson loaded up the group's bus, then driving the 90 miles to Philly, to be up and receiving phone calls at 9.30. With growing acceptance he became more relaxed and accessible to members of the press and public, and gradually began to talk more about his early life in Birmingham, Alabama, "The Magic City". He told me about his apprenticeship with Professor John

Tuggle Whitley who had nurtured fledgling bandleaders Teddy Hill and Erskine Hawkins as well as Count Basie's great drummer Jo Jones, and spoke about pianist Avery Parrish, composer of the classic "After Hours" and the close friend of his teenage years. And he talked about some of the blues singers he'd accompanied, singing out the flamboyant and little-known Dr Jo Jo Adams who, with his matching sets of tuxedo and full tails in various colours, greatly appealed to Sunny's sense of the visually spectacular.

Now he'd conduct business meetings *al fresco*. Outside Penn Station one day in 1972 we sat together on the edge of a flowerbed with the faithful Wilkinson keeping guard — there's no other way of describing his

vigilance — while Sunny related stories of the group's visit to Egypt the previous December. Going there had been a spur of the moment decision, he explained. When The Arkestra descended on Cairo, unannounced, the Minister of Culture had arranged for a performance by the Egyptian Ballet to be cancelled so that they could play. Contrary to what some Western sceptics might have imagined, the Egyptian reaction to the pianist's assumed name was one of respect. A newspaper article talked of his "Pharaonic descent" and commented that the faces of Arkestra members had "an Egyptian cast". On a trip to the Pyramids they played their cassettes inside and outside the tombs, encouraged by cab drivers and their guides who felt their music "sounded Egyptian". He gave me copies of his newest albums *Nahomni* and *Nature's God*, recorded in Egypt with the assistance of Harmut Geerken, the German musicologist, composer and leading Raphie who worked for the Goethe Institute in Cairo and at whose Heliopolis house The Arkestra had given a concert.

As I spent more time in New York, I decided I wanted to write a book about the new jazz. While *As Serious As Your Life* began to take shape, I spoke to dozens of musicians who embraced the new black aesthetic. I found that it was virtually an article of faith for young bloods to have played with Sun Ra, however briefly. Spending time in his circle was an important training ground, even if it entailed little or no financial reward. Musicians might visit the Sun Studio daily for a period or move into the house for days or weeks at a time. Others would drop in on rehearsals just to absorb something of the atmosphere and learn from Sun Ra's philosophy. Although he would welcome many no-hopers into the fold, sensing a latent ability that few others could spot, those unable to stay the course were likely to earn Sunny's sarcasm and scorn. However, to have spent some time in his company was considered a mark of achievement and an important part of the procedure for becoming a 'New York musician'. Among those who had gone the distance in Chicago were three highly regarded bassists, Richard Davis, Richard Evans and Wilbur Ware. In New York, saxophonist Pharoah Sanders and the late guitarist Sonny Sharrock paid their dues with him. And there were many lesser-known figures, such as trumpeters Ahmed Abdulah, Earl Cross and Ted Daniel, saxophonist Noah Howard and drummer Art 'Sharkey' Lewis, who put in apprenticeships at the court of the mythical modern day Ellington.

Sun Ra told me how he'd first met Farrell 'Little Rock' Sanders, as he was still known on his arrival from California. The Arkestra went to pianist Gene Harris's Playhouse, a MacDougal Street coffeehouse, and in order to listen to them nightly, the saxophonist found a waiter's job there. Homeless at first, he spent weeks sleeping rough and in stairways until Sun Ra allowed him to join in at rehearsals, gave him a place to stay and encouraged him to 'Egyptianise' (my term) his name. Sunny told me he planned to release his tapes from that period. "That should be very interesting to show the world what pre-Coltrane Pharoah Sanders was like," he commented with a gleam in his eye.

If the list of those who'd played with him was endless, so, too, were the stories — about Sunny, the Gemini who revelled in the duality of his sign and used his predestined astrological nature as an excuse for treating his sidemen with a certain ambivalence. If his generosity was well-known, then so was his meanness. When gigs were scanty and transportation costs for so large a number of bodies and equipment rapidly absorbed receipts, keeping a tight rein on the purse strings was paramount. To play the music was Sunny's number one priority, and if years living close to the edge had caused him to develop a certain parsimony, it was understandable. But tales of the struggles some went through while waiting to get paid and the ensuing after-gig shenanigans were legion in the music community. And when it came to the way he controlled his men — they would have to ask permission to go out on a date or visit family members — that some would stand for such treatment was a matter of debate in a community perpetually concerned with historical denials of manhood. Noah Howard was particularly scathing. "Sun Ra runs his band like an army," he told me. "When he says 'Stand up!' they stand up. When he says 'Sit down!' they sit down." He even had one of the musicians stand guard at the door all night.

"It's like anything else," Sun Ra explained. "When the army wants to build men they isolate



Ronnie Byrkins, Marshall Allen, Sun Ra and Herby Griffin, Sun Studio, New York, 1966

them. It's just the case that these are musicians, but you might say they're mummies. They have to know everything. In their case, knowing everything means touching on all places of music. Of course they won't get as much chance to play as other musicians, but on the other hand, they're getting more chance to play."

In an attempt to keep living costs down, he convinced The Arkestra to eat the humble turtle bean, lecturing them on its magical, nutritional powers, when he took his own turn in the kitchen, he prepared vegetarian stews with fine Southern skills. Despite the rigorous conditions he imposed, Sun Ra succeeded in building an army of men who were prepared to drop whatever they were doing at a moment's notice and rehearse for hours. Clifford Jarvis, one of the best drummers who ever played with him, saw many young men crumble in the face of the leader's demands. "He can build your hopes up and tear you down at the same time. A lot of guys wig out, you know. Some of them can't stand to be that sincere. They don't have any foundation to be that steady and stable with what Sun Ra has to offer."

While living in New York I got to know Roger Blank, another of Sunny's drummers. Roger and Carol, his painter wife, became good friends with whom I stayed on several occasions. From their sensitive analysis I learned a great deal about Sun Ra's nature and his ways of operating. Roger, whose revered drums can be heard on *The Magic City*, played percussion on the second ESP volume of *The Heliocentric Worlds*. With Sun Ra on piano and celeste, he's also a sideman on vibraphonist Walk Dickenson's *A Patch Of Blue*. In order to praise his erstwhile leader, he paraphrased Shelley: "Musically, Sun Ra is one of the unknowledged legislators of the world." Carol pointed out how he seemed to attract individuals who were in need of strong guidance. His, she said, was essentially a nurturing role, and I began to see Sunny as being both mother and father to those in his care. There was something appropriate about this, considering that his sexuality remained undetermined. Many, myself included, subscribed to the idea that Sunny was gay, now, because it appears he had seldom expressed his sexuality in physical terms, that long-held belief seems in doubt. Biographer John Szwed has



Marshall Allen, John Gilmore and Danny Davis



concluded that for most of Sunny's life he was celibate, yet from what I observed and knew of him, it was clear to me that his was a homoerotic sensibility. Although he was loved by those in his immediate circle, other musicians, in moments of irreverence, sometimes referred to him as "Ol' Maria Ra".

In 1979 I was in Germany for the Moers Free Jazz Meeting, where The Arkestra was playing. A number of older musicians were traveling in Sunny's entourage, among them Robert Barry, his first Chicago drummer, and the reunions between Arkestra members and other Chicagoans such as The Art Ensemble were a joy to witness. Sun Ra was thoroughly enjoying himself in the relaxed festival atmosphere, and agreed that I might come out to the house in Philadelphia to talk to John Gilmore. It was a long cherished ambition of mine, for I had come to regard Gilmore as one of the most profound and daring saxophonists I'd ever heard. Despite his comparative anonymity within the ranks of The Arkestra, a subjugation and denial of the artist's ego that Sun Ra encouraged, it seemed to me that Gilmore just got better and better.

So it was that I travelled to the City of Brotherly Love and made my way to 5626 Morton Street in Germantown, the final home of The Arkestra. Outside the sun was shining. The summer air rang with raucous greetings and laughter as neighbours dropped by or sat on the doorstep with Sunny and passed the time of day. But in Gilmore's room — the walls spray-painted with mystical patterns and hung with snapshots from various gigs — the atmosphere was one of total dedication to music. His saxophone lay on the bed beside him as we talked, oddly naked without its mouthpiece, a falo of guitar music was propped open on a music stand. Cupboards bulged with clothes, and books on music and spiritual matters lay everywhere. Gilmore, born in Mississippi but raised in Chicago from the age of two, spoke slowly in the deep, sonorous tones of the city's black Southside. With a gentleness of expression that belied his ferocious approach to the instrument, he told me about the time, not long after moving to New York, when he sat in with Willie Bobo's Latin ensemble at Birdland

and John Coltrane came running up from the back of the club shouting, "John Gilmore! John Gilmore! You got it, you got it — you got the concept!" After the set, he said, Coltrane insisted on having an on-the-spot lesson. Impoverished and struggling, Gilmore was reluctant at first to impart his secrets to someone who was already a success, but he reasoned that his situation as an unknown in the city left him with little option. Later Coltrane would acknowledge the source of his inspiration when he recorded his iconic blues masterpiece "Chasin' The Train".

Sunny peeped into the room to assure himself that everything was under control, then went off for a catnap. On the question of discipline, his saxophonist declared, "When you look at it, it's hard, but it makes sense. It could be no other way if you want to do your best for the music. He's created a certain standard on a high level and you have to keep on rehearsing to keep that music up there. It's no good to come out with sloppy performances." Despite the continuing lack of financial reward, he felt that playing Sunny's music had made his life worthwhile. "What we've been doing is of benefit to the people. Some people listen to the music and it helps them. It's got a lot of happiness and love in it, not sadness and gravity — Sun Ra's not about that. It's been highly rewarding."

When we'd finished talking, Gilmore excused himself and went off to the local cinema to take in a horror movie. Sun Ra permitted himself a few sarcastic comments about his favourite tenorman's pastime, then jammed a metal pyramid over one set of headphones and two layers of headgear to be photographed in yet another weird and wonderful guise — his favourite pastime. A lazy afternoon ensued. Marshall Allen, splattered in paint from a decorating foray, arrived with a brown and white spaniel and sat on the step with a pencil and scrap of paper to do the 'numbers', the unofficial lottery. Then conga drummer Akitakan came by with a lady friend. She got a hint of the 'treatment', but Sunny seemed to have mellowed where all that was concerned. While the musicians enjoyed the warm weather and relative quiet of the street, we talked about matters of little consequence. On Gilmore's return, Sun Ra squeezed us into a car so that one of his trumpeters could drive me to the station. On the way he regaled us with tales of his teenage years in Birmingham and said he was still trying to play pieces Avery Parrish had taught him. We parted company, but as the train started up, I heard a shout. Sunny had signed one of his latest singles for me and I'd left it behind. Now, puffing and panting, but imbued with the energy of a man half his age, he ran beside the track and thrust the record into my hand. "You mustn't forget this one," he smiled in the manner of a someone with "a lot of happiness and love in him, not sadness and gravity" — albeit one who knew he was making history with his every move. How could I have forgotten it? How could I forget him? □ A series of programmes on Sun Ra will be broadcast on Radio 3 during September. See Soundings for details.

Sun Ra, Philadelphia, 1979

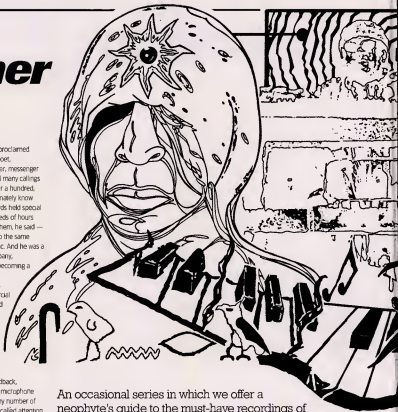


# the primer

**S**un Ra — philosopher, poet, self-proclaimed space alien, free jazz innovator, poet, traditionalist, prophet, cosmic joker, messenger for the Creator — had many names and many callings. But he had even more records, well over a hundred, and it is by his records that we shall ultimately know him. And this is as it should be, for records held special importance for Sun Ra. He spent hundreds of hours listening alone — the only way to hear them, he said — two people of different spirits listening to the same record can cause problems for the music. And he was a pioneer in creating his own record company, controlling every aspect of production, becoming a sonic auteur.

By the time that his El Saturn Records began to appear in the 1950s, commercial record companies had already perfected a style which assured that the recording process itself would be invisible, the machinery of phonography being used as a picture window through which an illusion was created of 'being there' with the musicians. But Sun Ra consistently violated this convention by recording live at strange sites, using feedback, distortion, high delay or reverb, unusual microphone placement, abrupt fades or edits, and any number of other effects, noises or accidents which called attention to the recording process. (On some records you can hear a phone ringing, or someone walking near the microphone.) It was a rough style of production, an anti-style, which antedated both free jazz and punk production to come, but also reflected a shrewd sense of how one could shape album-sized works out of hours of rehearsal recordings and at the same time make the studio a part of the performance.

The process by which Saturn records came into existence and were distributed was as mysterious as the rest of Sonny's life. The albums were assembled and sequenced by an obscure syntax, often mixing together recordings done on different occasions, at rehearsals and in the studio, then labelling them all with the same date, or with the wrong personnel, so that *The Arkestra* might appear to be playing in widely divergent styles on a single occasion, 45 rpm singles of a given composition might or might not contain the version which appeared on the LP which followed, or the same composition might turn up on different LPs with no mention that they had been issued before. Many of the records had hand-drawn covers and labels, the wrong titles or no titles at



An occasional series in which we offer a neophyte's guide to the must-have recordings of some of the names we like to drop a lot. This month, John F Szwed follows **Sun Ra** on a journey to the outer limits of sound. Illustration: Savage Pencil

all. Sometimes they were labelled as being in "Solar High Fidelity" or were registered with "Interplanetary BMI". Sonny called the Saturn releases his "avant garde" records. "Whatever I think people are not going to listen to, I've always recorded it."

There was no conventional advertising for El Saturn Records, no promotional copies for review, and no distribution channels except mail order, hand delivery to a few record shops, and sales from the bandstand after performances. Orders sent to the El Saturn address might or might not get a response, and when a record came it might be a different one than ordered. For years it was only possible to locate Sun Ra's recordings by synchronicity, acts of God, or with the help of those wired into the record underground. Only recently have the Vaults of Saturn finally begun to open to us.

## Sun Ra: The Singles (Evidence ECD 22164 2CD)

The singles are among the rarest of the Sun Ra oeuvre, ranging from his mid-50s doo-wop experiments to boogie R&B (such as singer Yochannan's "The Sun One" — a boasting riff tune with cosmological overtones, wherein the Sun King emerges as a mack man — and "Message To Earthman", a short account of an alien invasion set against swirling horns), there are alternate takes from Saturn LPs, charmed poems like "The Bridge" and some 1982 parlour piano. Since *The Singles* is organized chronologically this would seem to be the place for the beginner to start, but the total of Sun Ra's music follows no easy progression, and many later recordings sound as if they should be the earliest.



This set purports to contain all known Saturn singles with Sun Ra (some of which exist in only one copy!), but who can be sure?

### Sun Song (Delmark DD-411 CD)

This, the first Sun Ra LP (originally titled *Jazz By Sun Ra* on Transition Records), was recorded in Chicago by the legendary African-American producer Tom Wilson, who in 1956 was busy organizing the first recordings of Cecil Taylor, John Coltrane and Sun Ra as leaders, and later went on to produce Frank Zappa, Nico, The Velvet Underground, and Bob Dylan's first electric group. Though nothing here is especially startling, *Sun Song* gives us a hint of what earlier Ra groups must have sounded like, especially Ellingtonian pieces like "New Horizons," the theme song for Ra's first Chicago big band, and "Fall Off The Log" in turn recalls a chorale-dance step from his days as pianist with Fletcher Henderson's group at the Club DeLuxe. But other

composers offer subtle clues of things to come: "Possession," for instance, a waltz written by London composer Harry Revel for *Perfume For To Music*, a suite of tunes originally arranged and recorded by Les Baxter with lush string writing, harp, oboe, theremin and Novachord organ. Though Sun Ra's version is straightforward, the choice itself tells us something about his listening habits at the time and his vision of the future.

### Super-Sonic Jazz (Evidence EDS 22015 CD)

The first LP on Saturn, Sun Ra's own label. This 1956 recording included "India" and the two-part "Sundology," segments of a larger unrecorded work called "Sundology (A Suite Of Philosophical Sounds)." "India" was built on a single chord, and was laden with percussion, "Sundology" was rightly described by Sonny as "a different kind of blues." Chicago was a source of inspiration for many compositions here, as some of the

trifles reflect, though the connection was never simple. "Ei Is The Sound Of Joy," for instance, honours the Canaanite God, but also signifies on Fletcher Henderson's 1934 recording, "Hotter Than 'Ei'," as well as being a praise song for the elevated trans which connect all of Chicago and ran past Sun Ra's apartment. This was part of a "Chicago Suite," which also included "Springtime In Chicago" and "Street Named Hell." On "Springtime" Sonny plays a piano so out of tune it sounds "prepared," altered for percussive effects. And the electronic delay used on this cut was so extreme that it reverberates like a King Tubby dub.

Most of these pieces have some family resemblance to the music of the era — clipped post-bop touches, funk gestures, Latin affections. But acoustic and electric piano alternating within the same solo, the presence of an electric bass, otherwise evocative melodies decentred by unexpected accents and intervals, swirling rhythms punched up with heavy timpani accents — none of these quite fit the profiles of either swing or bebop, and manage to make both styles seem slightly strange.

### Sound Of Joy (Delmark 414 CD)

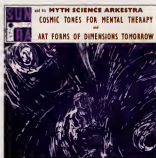
What in 1956 was supposed to be *Jazz By Sun Ra Vol 2 on Transition*, did not appear until 1968 when Delmark issued it as *Sound Of Joy*. Now with two baritone saxophones and bass and timpani in the group, "Two Tones," "Ankik," and "Reflections In Blue" have an enormous bottom sound. "Overtones Of China" extends the orientalism of some earlier jazz with gongs and wood blocks, asymmetrical themes and the feel of shifting time, and two pieces ("Paradise" and "Planet Earth") are given idiosyncratic Latin rhythms. Running through all of them are unusually-concocted background riffs, multi-thematic melodies (each having different rhythms and different keys), timpani solos, and surprising counter melodies.

Though this sequence of tunes approximates what Sun Ra was playing at clubs, it must have seemed unusual music at the time, evolving as sources, but never surrendering to them. It was music which could drift past without notice, which could even be danced to, but nonetheless was uneasy listening. Nothing was quite what it seemed.

### Jazz In Silhouette (Evidence ECD 22012 CD)

Silhouette from 1958 was a major statement by The Arkestra, helped by the addition of Hobart Dossan, an exceptional trumpet player who later worked with Lionel Hampton and Charles Mingus. Dossan's composition "Enlightenment," the first of The Arkestra's "space marches," became a nightly staple for the next 36 years, a vehicle on which the whole group stood or marched or sang in unison. It loped along like some

cartoon animal theme, but quickly transformed itself by turns into a hard bop anthem and a rhapsodic theme cut by cha-cha, march and 4/4 swing rhythms, all of it accomplished without the melody repeating itself. "Ancient Aethopia" calls up the spirit of Blington's programmatic "African" themes like "Pyramid" or "Mendek". But what The Arkestra achieved on this piece was unprecedented in jazz (though Ravel's *Bohème* might be claimed as a distant relative): by means of the simplest of structures (a single chord and a crisp but subtly shifting Latin *tingé* rhythm) The Arkestra is set free from the conventions of the pop song and its grip on the swing era, but also liberated from the harmonic residue of the same songs left over from the beboppers' appropriation. Once the ensemble states the melody, two flutes improvise collectively; a poised Dotson solo takes full advantage of the harmonic freedom which in a few years would be called modality. Sun Ra plays with the bass tones of the piano ringing out rhythmically against the drums, musicians blow through mouthpieces without their horns, and two singers intone words so softly and independently that their parts cancel each other out. But improvised and open as "Aethopia" is, there is an inescapable sense of direction, a destiny about the piece. And as with all of Sun Ra's work, pieces as prophetic as these coexist on the same record with slightly outré two-beat compositions like "Hours After". The cover proclaims that "This is the sound of silhouettes, images and forecasts of tomorrow disguised as jazz," and who could deny it?



### Cosmic Tones For Mental Therapy/Art Forms Of Dimensions Tomorrow

(Evidence ECD 22036 CD)

With The Arkestra now located in New York City, and recording everything they played at rehearsals (they had few public appearances for several years), *Cosmic Tones* was recorded in 1963. "And Otherness" is a small group study of the lower tones — bass, bass clarinet, bass trombone, baritone sax, the chamber-like quality of the piece bolstered by bassist Rome

Boylan's rich bowed passages. On "Thither And Yon", oboe, bowed bass and drums are overwhelmed by such reverberation that it now seems to anticipate psychedelia two years before the fact. Other pieces on the record were recorded live at ten in the morning at the Top Top Club in Brooklyn when it was possible to borrow their Hammond B-3, the organ of choice in the 60s, but instead of using it for obvious funk purposes, Sun Ra employed it for its tonal colours.

*Art Forms Of Dimensions Tomorrow* was recorded earlier, in 1961-62. "Cluster Of Galaxies" and "Solar Drums" are early experiments with studio sound, rhythm section exercises with such strange reverberations that the instruments' identities begin to disappear and turn the music into low budget musique concrète. On "The Outer Heavens" Sun Ra used no rhythm section at all, just a chamber group of Ra's panditband a quartet of reeds and a trumpet, each player developing his own lines with relative independence. But "Infinity Of The Universe" is nearly all rhythm section, built around a centre established by a repeated rumbling figure deep in the bass of the piano, with trumpet and bass clarinet joining only at the end. From the very first, then, the New York Saturn recordings suggested that every record would be idiosyncratic, as if they had been made by different groups.

### When Sun Comes Out

(Evidence ECD 22068 CD)

A rehearsal recording from 1962-63, *When Sun Comes Out* appeared in black or handwritten covers. There were still backward-looking atavistic flute solos and bolero-like drums, and "Circle" had a wordless vocal which suggested the Duke Ellington of "Creole Love Song". But innovations were everywhere else on the record: three years after the first version, a new treatment of "We Travel The Spaceways" shows Sun Ra's piano becoming increasingly atonal, suddenly erupting into double-double time figures, on "Calling Planet Earth" Pat Patrick tests the physical limits of the baritone saxophone and strays freely from Sun Ra's persistent mining of a single tonal centre on the piano. And behind most of the pieces, breaking up the beat, unsettling the expected groove, is Clifford Jarvis, the most tempestuous and sophisticated drummer that Sun Ra would ever have.

### Other Planes Of There

(Evidence ECD 22037 CD)

In 1964 Sun Ra shifted his methods once again. The title piece is a major work, and a departure from everything he had done before. At 22 minutes, it took up a whole side of an LP, and was one of the longest pieces ever recorded by a jazz group at the time. Despite being collectively improvised it is astonishingly coherent and organic: there are 12 instruments, though very few play at the same time; solos appear and disappear quickly, a trombone solo seems to rise from nowhere and lay a foundation for the other horns

to enter, at times the piece threatens to become conventionally rhythmic in a jazz sense, but never yields to the temptation, and the drums continue to play textually, almost melodically. Sun Ra's piano weaves through it all, linking the parts together, until at the end they all rise inevitably together.



### The Magic City

(Evidence ECD 22069 CD)

*The Magic City*, a direct reference to Sun Ra's "home town" Birmingham, Alabama, was collectively improvised in 1965 and lacks a fixed theme as such, though individual statements and isolated notes flow together to form an incremental melody. Like many of his compositions from this period, it was sketched out with only a rough sequence of solos and a mutual understanding which came from grueling daily rehearsals. Sun Ra gave it order by pointing to players, by signalling with numbers which referred to prepared themes and effects, and by hand gestures to direct the musicians on what to play — what composer Butch Morris would later call "conduction".

Sun Ra simultaneously plays piano and Selmer Clavoline, usually in conjunction with Ronnie Boykins' bowed bass, but also at times with Roger Blank's reverbed drums, Robert Cummings's bass clarinet, or



Marshall Allen's piccolo. It ebbs and flows, with duos and trios appearing and disappearing, yet always returning to Ra's quietly grating keyboards and Boykins's singing basslines. Almost three-quarters of the way through, saxophones begin to enter in various configurations, followed by a sudden ensemble cry, and a quiet return to Ra and Boykins. There had been a grand attempt at collective improvisation — Ornette Coleman's earlier *Free Jazz* and John Coltrane's contemporaneous *Ascension* — but none had the seamless quality of *The Magic City*, nor its secret formalism (if anything, *Magic City* is closer to Karlheinz Stockhausen's completely annotated *Zehnnoten*). It was never played again after 1965, saxophonist John Gilmore said, because it was "unreproducible, a tapestry of sound."

## The Heliocentric Worlds Of Sun Ra Vol I (ESP 1014 CD)

*Heliocentric* was the second in a series of extraordinary recordings made in 1965. The title piece, like all of the works on Ra's mid-60s albums, builds its melody cumulatively, additively, through collective improvisation. Some might claim that "Heliocentric" lacks a melody, but they would surely recognize its motives, like the staggered entry of three trombones (which oddly suggests the "Kane" motive at the opening of *Citizen Kane*), a figure which also occurs in "Outer Nothingness" and "Of Heavenly Things." Melody or no, Sun Ra maintains interest by contrasts of register and texture, piccolo against bass, timpani, trombones and bass marimba. "Outer Nothingness" follows a similar pattern, and might even be another take of "Heliocentric." "Other Worlds" pits Sun Ra's furiously atonal piano (sometimes played simultaneously with celeste) against the rest of The Arkestra.



## Nothing Is (ESP 1045 CD)

In May of 1966 The Arkestra went on a one-week tour of New York State colleges sponsored by the ESP

label's Esperanto Foundation, and *Nothing Is* offers a glimpse of The Arkestra live on the road, suggesting that they were attempting to do as much as possible within a limited time on stage. Sun Ra can be heard during the group to what composition is coming next, moving from abstract piano openings to recognizable melodies, and compressing both "Imagination" and "Rocket Number Nine" into one minute and 44 seconds. It also shows that The Arkestra could improvise collectively live, even under the pressure of time.



## Atlantis (Evidence ECD 22067 CD)

Recorded at Nigerian drummer Olatunji's cultural centre in New York City in 1967, "Atlantis" is a 21 minute epic, with Sun Ra on the Gibson organ (a Farfas knockoff) and the Clavoline, beginning ominously with sonar beeps from the organ, then, as it develops, he rolls his hands on the keys, presses his forearm along the keyboard, plays with his hands upside down, spinning with his arms windmilling the keys — a virtual sonic representation of the flooding of Atlantis, a great smear of a solo, Sun Ra's "Toccata And Fugue."

## Sunrise In Different Dimensions (Hot Art 6059 CD)

## Mayan Temples (Black Saint 120121 CD)

Two of the more interesting of the later Arkestra recordings (many others are shoddily produced slap-dash affairs). *Sunrise* captures most of a 1980 concert from Wilkes, full of solo piano, some truly unusual versions of standards like "Tea For Two" or "Round Midnight," Charlie Parker tunes, and a sheaf of swing band hits.

*Mayan Temples* from 1990 revisits some of the 1950s material, especially the exotica, and some 30s and 40s pop tunes. A bit of a jolt to those who thrive on the magisterial improvisations of the 60s and 70s, but a far representation of the range of musics which could be heard from the group in the later years.

## Out There A Minute (Blast First BFFP 042 CD/MC)

## Cosmic Visions (Blast First BFFP 101 CD/VHS VIDEO)

*Out There A Minute* is a good first-stop anthology selected by Sun Ra himself, and in the Saturn tradition, it mixes together pieces recorded at seven different sessions between 1961 and 1970. Also in the Saturn tradition, there is no annotation, personnel or recording details, but nonetheless the compilation samples from otherwise unavailable records like *The Night Of The Purple Moon*, *Continuation*, and the very rare *When Angels Speak Of Love*.

*Cosmic Visions* is a box set containing a CD single of Sun Ra reciting the poem "I Am The Instrument", short samples of Ra's writings and poetry, and, more crucially, a video featuring Phil Niblock's experimental short *Magic Sun*, which was filmed at The Arkestra's mid-60s New York house, and the extraordinary 1972 film *Space Is The Place*, in which Ra stars in what is perhaps the world's only Biblical sci-fi exploitation phantasy.



These choices are only a start. What's still missing from the reissues are crucial mid-period Ra masterworks. The serious listener should go to any lengths to hear Saturn releases such as the 1966 *Strange Strings*, on which the Arkestra plays exotic stringed instruments that they did not know how to tune, much less play, with spectacular results, the 1970 *My Brother The Wind* with two mini-Moogs paired-up for sounds never heard before or since, *Out Beyond The Kingdom Of* from 1974, where Ra's incredible free piano concerto "Discipline 99" coexists with full-throttle swing tunes like "How Am I To Know?", and *Language* (Philly Jazz, 1978), disco-inspired, but nonetheless subliminally cosmic music. Evidence, hat Art and Black Saint releases are distributed by Harmonia Mundi, Denmark by Topic, ESP by ZYX, and Blast First by RTM. John F. Szwed's book, *Space Is The Place: The Lives And Times Of Sun Ra*, is published this month by Payback Press, and is reviewed on page 76.

# charts

Playlists from the outer limits of planet sound

## Other Music 15

**Group Ongaku** — Music Of Group Ongaku (Hear Sound Art Library)  
**Spectrum** — Forever Alien (Space Age)  
**Brigitte Fontaine/Areski** — Vous Et Nous (Saravali)  
**Various** — Music From The Tomb Of The Cyberman (Via Satellite)  
**Achim Reichel** — AR3 (Germanophon)  
**Legendary Pink Dots** — Halfway Of The Gods (Solemoon)  
**Sun City Girls** — Live In Japan (Japan Overseas)  
**Miles Davis** — In Concert: Live At Philharmonic Hall (Sony/Columbia)  
**Gyaantes** — I (Castan Trip)  
**Conrad Schnitzler** — Rot (Plate Lunch)  
**L'Voog** — The Way Out (Alcohol)  
**Village Of Savoyana** — Philipp Schatz (Communion)  
**Steve Lacy** — Straws (Cramps)  
**Current 93/Murse With Wound/Christoph Heemann** — In A Foreign Town (Dunelm)  
**Roger Doyle** — Babel Project Vol 2 (Silverdoor)  
*Compiled by Jeff Gibson, Other Music, 15 East 4th Street, New York, NY 10003, USA*

## Organised Sound 10

**House On Mars** — Autodistack (Too Pure)  
**Liquid Liquid** — Liquid Liquid (Mk2 Wax)  
**Woodfish/Solvent** — Split EP (Suction)  
**Various** — Silverkation (Soup Desk)  
**Graham** — EP (Output)  
**Various** — Skampler (Silent)  
**Coldcut** — Let Us Play (Ninja Tune)  
**Te Rocco Rot** — Rans 25 (City Slang)  
**David Kristian** — National Kid/Oysterpoint (Discreet)  
**Kands** — Val Wok (Karaoke Kalk)  
*Compiled by Linus Roth, Organised Sound Records, Montreal*

## A Difficult List

**Horton Feldman** — Piano & String Quartet (Nonesuch)  
**LaMonte Young** — The Second Dream Of The High Tension Line Steadown Transformation Theatre Of Eternal Music (Gramavision)  
**Erik Satie** — Variations (Decca)  
**Charlemagne Palestine** — Strumming Music (New Tone)  
**Steve Reich** — Drumming (Deutsche Grammophon)  
**Iannis Xenakis** — Pleades (Harmonia Mundi)  
**Skozey Fetisch** — Morina Kay (Silent)

**Machine For Making Sense** — On Second Thoughts (Tall Poppies)  
**Paul Schütze** — Deus Ex Machina (Extreme)  
**Terry Riley** — In C (25th Anniversary Performance) (New Albion)  
**Hands To** — Nacha (Marifield)  
**Warren Burt** — 39 Dissonant Etudes (Tall Poppies)  
**John Cage** — Five Stone Wind (Mode)  
**Jonathan Harvey** — Bhakti (NMC)  
**Fetisch Park** — Trost (Extreme)  
*Compiled by Björn Hörsch, Difficult Listening, RRG/FF, Perth, Western Australia, Sundays, 9-11pm  
(http://singleline.com.au/difficult)*

## Nova Express 14

**Coldcut** — Let Us Play (Ninja Tune)  
**Pop/Low-Res** — Error Log (white)  
**Arthur Russell** — World Of Echo (Upside)  
**Juryman Vs Spacer** — Mail Order Justice (SSR)  
**Luke Vibert** — Big Soup (Mk2 Wax)  
**ju-Zik** — Lunatic Harms (Hut)  
**Buckfunk 3000** — In Is In (Language)  
**The Beatnuts** — Stone Crazy (Relativity)  
**The Tarantulas** — The Polio Groove (Intimal Bass)  
**Max 404** — Before And After (Universal Language)  
**Cut And Paste** — Do The Turtle (Freshanova)  
**Reflection** — The Eromomous World (Clear)  
**Alice Coltrane** — Journey In Satchidananda (Impulse)  
**Jason Brunton** — Relativity (Sirkus)  
*Compiled by Morphous, Radio Nova, Paris & Campus, Brussels*

## The Office Ambience

**Toru Takemitsu** — The Film Music Of (Nonesuch)  
**Jim O'Rourke** — Bad Timing (Drag City)  
**Elzbi** — The Photos Incident (Language)  
**Cosmic Invention** — Help Your Saton Mind (The Now Sound)  
**Various** — Souk Jazz (U)  
**Terre Thaemlitz** — GRRL (Comorose)  
**Various** — For Films Edit 2 (Freibank/PIAS)  
**Coldcut** — Let Us Play (Ninja Tune)  
**Bertolt Brecht** — Mack The Knife (Sony Classical)  
**Z-Rock** — Hawaii (Nip Guitars)  
**Autrechre** — Cich Suite EP (Warp)  
**The Amazing Band** — Roar (FHR)  
**Asteroid Desert Songs** — Tell Your Dog Come To Be Feed (CreativeMund)  
**Photek** — Modus Operandi (Science)  
**Muzio** — Muzio (MI)  
*Compiled by The Wire Sound System*

Tora Takemitsu

# sound check

Up to the mark: September's selected records



Right on brother: Archie Shepp reviewed page 81

## Fred Anderson/DKV Trio Fred Anderson/DKV Trio

DECCA/SK 001204 CD

## Muhai Richard Abrams Song For All

BLACK SAINT 130161 CD

Two albums by founder members of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians. Fred Anderson provides a sterling example of the AACM's concept. Spontaneous and sincere, the music is allowed to go anywhere it wants: gamelan, out-bop jazz with a touching sense of back porch intimacy. Maybe the closing blues is a little unambiguous, but Anderson's compositions — "Planet," "Aaron's Tunes," "Dark Day" — have a trompe l'oeil complexity worthy of Braxton. Drummer and bassist are terrific (though unnamed). The presence of an *ad lib* road player — presumably producer Ken Vandermark — creates some confusion about who is playing what, I'd guess that Anderson is the less exhibitionist, more harmonically intriguing sax player.

Over the last two decades Muhai Richard

Abrams has accumulated a staggering set of surus at Black Saint. His music is organised with such limpid clarity that those who only find jazz radicalism in abrasive chaos will fail to register its virtues. Abrams's primitive analysis of timbre and his alert rhythmic ear — as much in debt to Stravinsky as to Charlie Parker — project his seven piece into intricate, gleaming pieceworks. In drummer Reggie Nicholson, he has found a genius of pulse and cool. Eddie Allen (trumpet) and Aaron Stewart (sax) have their own voices, but are nonetheless committed to the decorative levity of the music. Trombonist Craig Harris's expressive scurms manage to fit right in too. On "Marching With Honor," bassist Brad Jones riffs so hip and propulsive you can imagine Prince listening in for ideas. On vibes, Bryan Carroll indulges the instrument's capacity for cheese and skeeze, but chimes out sensical abstractions, too.

Abrams's secret weapon is the synthesizer. His programming suggests a 60s lab technician who has just discovered line lights and marijuana and purple shirts and decided to rock out, man! The synth-only finale — "Imagne" — is a blueprint for an Abrams

arrangement. Realised with the synth's incongruous paps and whooshes, it suggests a cross between electronic *Yvaid* and syndriner Zappa. Well, boam.

That music this special — this cradly inventive, this dilly strange — is curandly confined to a ghetto called jazz is criminal. Muhai Abrams is not simply an inheritor of the legacy of Duke Ellington, he deserves the attention of anyone who ever loved Henry Cow. Black dada nihilism is not dead, it's being recorded by Jon Rosenberg on *Lower East Side*.

REN WATSON

## Aphasia

Stereosomocromism

KOPH PLASTICS INNOVATION/STORY PAPERBACKS KPH 011 CD

## Les Sculpteurs De Vinyl Memory And Money

STUPID & TACITUS ST 1012 CD

Stockhausen versus the Technocrats (The Wire 141) made desiring reading

## Reviewed this month:

**Muhai Richard Abrams** Fred

Anderson **Aphasia** Aube

**Baby Mammoth**

Berger/Hodge/Moutang/Rut

**Paul Bley** Don Cherry

**Coldcut** Crescent **Andrew**

**Cyrille** Elton Dean **Deviants**

Thomas Dimuzio **Dissolve**

Paul Dunnall **Phil Durrant**

Étage 34 **Mahmoud Fadi**

Farmers Manual **Fennesz**

Susanna Ferrar **Fila Brazilia**

Flux **Fong Naam** Fred Frith

**Soliman Gamil** Goem

**Grateful Dead** Keith Jarrett

**Kraut** Linnell **Bill Laswell**

**Material** Love Cry Want

**Macromassa** Wynton Marsalis

**Maurizio** Medeska Martin &

**Mood Merzbowl**

**Gore Beyond Necropsy**

Montage **Movietone** Dominic

Muldowney **David Murray**

ju-Zis **Q + Noto** Orchestre

Murphy **Paul Patterson**

Philosopher's Stone **Poetics**

Potiznik **Les Sculpteurs De**

**Vinyl** Archie Shepp

**Silverization2** Silverstone

**Solaxante** Etages Solarus

**Southern Journey** Spunk Jazz

**Squarepusher** Sun Ra

**Tarwater** Tosca **Unknown**

**Deutschland** Vanqueur

**Vienna Art Orchestra** L Voag

**John Wall** Wu Man **Iannis**

**Xenakis** Yung

**Coldcut**

**Let Us Play**

NINJA TUNE/ST 1000 • CD, RRP

**Coldcut**

**More Beats + Pieces**

NINJA TUNE/ST 0558 • CD

Coldcut's Matt Black and Jonathan More like to collage their beats in a linear snap-together way that looks back to Grandmaster Flash and Afrika Bambaata. Seeking ngarauty to the sound of Old Skool turntable sampling and its succession of quotes (right at the end of the album there's a snatch of Bill Burroughs describing his cut 'n' paste method), they collate their funky vibes along with rogue musical outtakes and spicy exclamations on a piston-like conveyor belt of breakbeats. They now work to a logic of inventive high-speed winning, as exemplified on *Let Us Play*'s most dazzling track, "More Beats + Pieces (Daddy Rips It Up Mix)": funky beats and guitar chops, disco breaks, DJ scratches, a snatch of early swing, the theme from *Peter And The Wolf*, and — in an inspired moment — a sweeping orchestral riff over a schoolyard chant.

*Let Us Play* is Coldcut's first album on their own Ninja Tune label. Coming at a time when they and their media heads at Hex are positively bursting with ideas, the album has a bubbly showcase feel. Apart from the usual smooth, funky odysseys, there's Talvin Singh playing tables on the opener; Salena Saliva delivers a sneering poem about club decadence called "Noah's Toilet"; "I'm Wild About The Thing" twines organic gasps with 50s sex education and a raunchy, poppy chorus; Jello Biafra of The Dead Kennedys delivers an anti-capitalist polemic over funky Electro-pop beats on "Every Home A Prison"; and the haunting "Parasitecan" samples soundtraces from 90s protests movements against a mournful, rippling Techno-style cello.

As if that wasn't enough ideas, the album comes with a CD-ROM complete with Ninja Tune cuts, video clips, a DIY remix-your-own Coldcut kit, and Hex's Playtime program for generating retro beats (used to create the Jello Biafra track).

Coldcut see *Let Us Play* as their most important album, charting the "impact of technology on a changing society". However, overdetermined with excited connections as it is,



the messages get a bit confused on the way — not least in their championing of technological games on the CD-ROM kit while their music samples the souls of anti-modernity protests, or in the way flashwords of violence and "the bomb" are laced into the music to spike the beat and crank up the fun rhythms. *Let Us Play*'s ultimate protest is, "Money I've got rhythm I haven't yet!", but their snappy, streetwise approach to cultural intervention seems preferable to stale bedroom rory or dystopian soundbites lifted from so-called B-movies.

The *More Beats + Pieces* EP of remixes covers different ground. In addition to Coldcut's blazing "Daddy Rips It Up Mix", Tortoise's John McEntire pulls a gliding Rave Grooves meets Easy Listening track out of the bag. T-Power's taste has a dry pumping drum 'n' bass energy that swoons into moments of dreamy drift. And there's a great series of scratch workouts from Kid Koala, Q-Bert, and a winning six scratch cut-and-thrust jam between Strictly Kev, Ollie Teeba and Kid Koala, broken up every step of the way with chase and chips of beat associations flying off the needles.

**MAIT FFTTCH**

Stockhausen refused to be impressed by Aphex Twin, Rikardson, Scanner and Daniel Pemberton, but it was equally disappointing that the younger sound artists could find little to appreciate in his work. Ultimately, my sympathies were with Stockhausen. If you helped cut the first paths into unknown territory with a pair of nail scissors, it must be a ming galore to see the tarmac go down and every technology speed by in their 4x4s.

Stockhausen and his modernist cranes were honest enough to jettison history. Too many postmodern connoisseurs refuse to acknowledge history but are happy to plunder or repeat it and profess originality. I'm making a general point, you understand, not leveling accusations. I've no idea where Aphex and Les Sculpteurs stand on Stockhausen. Pierre Schaeffer or Spike Jones (or whether reminiscences of peacocks like hymens, Kurzwelle, Telemusik or Cage's *Williams Mix* are deliberate, careless or entirely coincidental) but I will insist that this is World Music as pioneered by Stockhausen via Les Sculpteurs' "The United Nations" (a salute to Pluramoni?) and Aphex's sphoning of sounds from ether and environment.

*Mercy And Honey* celebrates the visceral virtues of vinyl, the smack of the platter, the bite of the stylus, the scratch and hiss of the groove, the rumble of the motor. Between the syncretized discs of the run in and run out, a rift of D is intermingled the output from several turntables, samplers and gears, heaping salvage from the ocean of recorded sound on layers of street noise. Plenty of I-Spy points to be had as scraps from discs ancient and modern are washed past. The 12 barely structured collages are profligate fun, predicated on the principle that more is never enough, and they're none the worse for that. Syncretism is more interesting, more carefully wrought, but this is the red end wider, taking in sources from synthesizers to lo-tech barbed wire and robot timber via public spaces and the short waves of the world. Aphex (aka Richard Johnson) deals in development and ambience in contrast to Les Sculpteurs' changes and events, though Johnson can stardie and surprise, too. Les

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**BARRY WITHERDEN**

## Berger/Hodge/Moufang/Ruit

Cloudbait  
RCA 674393 CD

## Potuznik

Amore Motore (Autobahn)  
R502 R50011 CD

Conjunct is a special project conceived by David Moufang (aka Move D, Deep Space Network) for his Heidelberg-based 4P20 label. A squad of electronic and jazz musicians including Karl Berger (vibraphone), Gurrer "Ruf" Kraus (guitar), and Moufang and Jame Hodge on a variety of synths, software, organs, guitars, bass, congas and mallets configure themselves to produce a record that sounds like The Modern Jazz Quartet scoring a soundtrack for luxury interplanetary travel ("The Catch"), the long-form, exploratory opening track, cuts in apparently in mid-jam, but soon develops into the closest approximation of Miles Davis's *In A Silent Way* I've ever heard. As on the latter's "Spirits/Peaceful", the music stretches its muscles like a recently formed lymph testing and flexing as new tissue. Over the ensuing eight numbers, the ensemble turns out a cohesive set of improvisations that fully satisfies the promises of live and electronic fusions that get banded about every few months ("Neue Serie" tosses Wes Montgomery's "puffy" guitar sound over the metering advance of a *Donk Mopos* drum loop, on "Fee Dum", the conflict of sizzling-time drum programming and languorous vibes makes for a heady, oxygen-rich atmosphere. A rare example of a record drawing on jazz and Electronica but taking both genres in an unforeseen direction.

Gerrard Potuznik began life as a saxophonist in the unit stretches of Vienna's jazz/hip-hop byways. Now, through the kind of dizzying twist of fate that seems part and parcel of Austrian existence, he's landed up as the first male of the Chival label's gallery of buckeneering Electro-punks. Amore Motore, his first solo album, arrives on Mega. With the exception of

"Autosubauger", which opens the record with a sucking, droning hum to clear the air, most of the tracks are based around straight-ahead, speeding analogue beatbox rhythms and the treated sounds of a family organ. Damping down the anarchic insanity of his parallel House project, Potuznik opts for a machine-led excursion along the roads already travelled by Kraftwerk and Modbus & Rodeolus, but unlike most experiences on today's highways, you travel quite a distance without being heavily taxed.

**ROB YOUNG**

## Crescent Electronic Sound Constructors SNAPEHOT CLK001 CD

## Movietone

Day And Night  
DOING INCEP CD

Two scruntions from Brazil's fertile soil. Both these records inherit the dark, herky-herky weirdness yet to come to shape from that city's music, though they pursue it in very different ways. Movietone's latest album, laden with nature and session titles ("Black Like Snow", "Summer", "Sun Drawing") specializes in understated ballads that stay just the safe side of languid. They're whispered by vocalist Kate Wright in a voice that bears intriguing traces of Nico, Sandy Denny and Tracey Thorn. Yet the sounds more exhausted than they ever did, too weary, even to project above the music, leaving the lyrics a blur of indistinct sounds in the general mood of contemplative, undressed regret.

When it works, as on "Useless Landscape", the effect is impressive, as quasi-Latin percussion and a high, hissing guitar (also Wright's) add range, class and texture. When it doesn't, as on "Noche Formosa", it amounts to little more than well-meaning tension. The most exhilarating 90 seconds on the record come at the beginning of "Summer", where plaintive piano notes compete with a swelling drone of guitar feedback. Momentarily it's an inspired vision of Sade being shoulder-charged by The Jesus And Mary Chain, but thereafter it lapses back into lifeless monotony. Fundamentally, Movietone make 90s bed-music, post-Tinley Cat. Stevens for sensitive English types.

Percussionist Matt Jones is the most consistently creative presence in Movietone, but his solo album under the name Crescent is slight. It's wannabe Aphex Twin with a side order of Eno — its standout track "Abstract Forms" sounds like an outtake from Another Green World — a set of doodles that never find satisfactory shape. A ready organ loses itself in dub phasing. Sombre bass and rodded sax play tag in a distant nightclub. Scattered piano trios and vocal wails drip in and out of the mix. There's some promising raw material here, but Jones would have done better to refine it before putting out this inimitably diverting sketchbook.

**ANDY FELDHOUSE**

## Andrew Cyrille Quintet

Ode To The Living Tree  
NINETENTH 02021185 CD

Drummer Andrew Cyrille was well prepared for the free jazz explosion of the 60s. He'd voraciously drummed for the singer and pianist Nette Lutzcher, Texas avant-jazzers Jacques and Coleman Hawkins. His tenure with Cecil Taylor from 1965-75 established him as a leading exponent of free-time percussion. He recorded one of the few inimitable drum records — *What About?* — for the BYG label

in 1969. Ode To The Living Tree was recorded in Dakar last year and fulfils a long-held ambition to visit Africa.

It begins well, with a duet between Cyrille and Senegalese percussionist Prior Thom. The latter's brittle finger taps recall the "tension" music of 70s films (a little reflection shows this connection is not fortuitous). *Shoff and Across* 7:10m Street assailed to the threat to bourgeois complacency represented by Afro consciousness). To signs alerted by the invocation, the quartet's 19 minute "A Love Supreme" sounds less like jazz than a psychedelic drum symphony, with Fred Horkens's gorgeous bass cast as an especially sensual drum. Cyrille's command of timbre has rarely sounded better, rather than a drum solo, his showcase is an orchestral bouquet. Almost Oliver Lake whorls up a keening storm. David Murray's bass clarinet sings a sweet lament salted with Dixieland-style joke guides and his own climactic climax. Adigbolu Steve Colson's electric piano is exemplary, indelible clusters evade the tempered strapjack (a reminder that fusion was sometimes about advanced tone colour). In fact, a crabwise working through of the chords of Colson's tune, brings home the dialectical solution of the jazz process, by avoiding harmonic security, instead, it allows vocated character and spontaneity to speak.

Thereafter, things are pleasant rather than great. "My PC" (included, like the other Colson tune, at the producer's request) is perfunctory, its top thickness less suited to the quartet's lofty freedoms. The title track sounds like a David Murray Octet number without the all important ensemble parade. Murray's own "Dakar Darkness" and Colson's "Midnight Samba" are throwaway excursions.

Although the visit to Senegal was evidently an emotional trip for these artists, it produced a relaxed vibe; the results don't compare to their best New York work. As usual, Murray's full-pelt emotionalism perks up even the dullest of ballads, but only "A Love Supreme" has the pitch of collective invention we look for in these great guardians of the flame.

**BOB WATSON**

## Elton Dean Quartet + Roswell Rudd

Rumours Of An Incident  
SLAH CD 223 CD

## Elton Dean/Paul Dunmall/Tony Levin/Paul Rogers/Roswell Rudd/Keith Tippett Blade

UNIVERSITY MUSIC 92 CD

## Paul Dunmall Octet Deatre And Liberation

SLAH 02025 CD

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## HELIUM THE MAGIC CITY GLE 195



## MECCA NORMAL WHO SHOT ELVIS GLE 245



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# Fred Frith Guitar Quartet

Ayaan's Mooses

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## Larval

Larval

ALBANY'S HARMONIES AND ST. CO.

Formed seven years ago, the Fred Frith quartet finally released its first CD. The music within is a dazzling display of... virtually everything that electric guitars can produce in the right hands. The pieces run the gamut, from clean strumming and delicate melody through to blocks of atonal noise and all points in between. The electric guitar was originally, and will always essentially be a rock instrument — at least to these ears — and there's something of the spirit of rock 'n' roll in this chamber ensemble playing, certainly in its energy and hands-on and amped-up visceral power.

Although ostensibly his group, Frith's quartet isn't merely a platform for his ego. The other members, Rene Lusner (who also played in Les Quatre Guitares De L'Apocalypse Bar), Nicki Dokovskiy and Mark Stewart, each chip in a piece.

The tracks range from strict composition to spontaneous exclamations. The delicate oriental style unison passages in Vivier's "Pulau Dewata" are intermittently broken up by blasts of ferocious power. The group composition "The Stinky Boy Suite" throws up huge blocks of noise which sandwich insect screeches and single bent notes. Here, Frith's strident, staccato strummed brittle chord in solo seems to lead over what sounds like the three other guitars being dismantled. The hour or so of music is staggering.

The three guitar frontline of Larval — the line-up is completed by bass, drums and two saxophones — might lack the subtlety and invention of the Frith Quartet, but they're capable of producing dense, shifting rock riffs. Their live-invents are big and blocklike and four-square, especially the thunderous "Madagascar." There are a mere three guitars featured on the self-titled album, with bass, drums and two saxophones.

The other guitars sometimes recall the thrill of Sonic Youth and Frith's old group Massacre, the ponderous



Fred Frith

rhythm section unfortunately sounds like that of the other Messaker, which keeps Caspar Brotzman's music from truly soaring. However, the excitement level goes up a notch when the saxophones of John Evans and Otto Kentrol kick in on pieces like "Surfing In Detroit" and "Slow Death Of A Very Large Animal," with their thick deep lines cutting free like the cries of giant flightless birds.

PIKE BARNES

The Elton Dean Quartet at a spirited, if somewhat "traditional sounding," free jazz gig in North London, "traditional sounding," that is, unless one subscribes to Simon H. Fell's intention: view that a conservative improv audience (and, by extension, a conservative improvised music) is one that is inherently unsympathetic to any performance involving tunes.

While maintaining the right to play melodically (happily), the line-up on the studio recording (Black) sets out on a more ambitious and uplifting journey that ditches the relative practices of traditional frontline and supporting instrumental roles.

"Forced" awakens like a dawn chorus, with a child's musical box, Rogers's pizzicato, Lewis's cymbals and shakers, and pianist Tippett's brooding vocal warbling setting the scene. The latter is the most inspirational personality here, unafraid to sink into and shake up the general scheme and shape of things, to invite unexpected moods (letting percussive repetitions, below urgency, a slow blues, etc.) sometimes with a devilish streak of humor. A part among improv pioneers, the range of his recorded collaborator has sadly diminished over the years.

Tippett, Rogers and Levin also appear in Paul Durrail's roles, alongside Simon Picard, Gehn Liddington, Anne Whitehead and Chris Bridges. Durrail's starting point for his post-notated, part-improvised *Desire And Liberation* suite is the Gospel of St. John Rumiakrishna, his intention being to infuse the music with a similar spirituality. Not an ethereal, saffron-robed New Age project, you understand, but what transpires comes on like late period Coltrane, where motivational jazz improvising is sometimes pushed to breaking point as expression enters feverish, non-idiomatic territory. Durrail's and Picard's tenor solos, while gripping in their intensity, adhere too closely to the contours of Coltrane's turbulent path of ascent. Elsewhere, the group's charts swing high over Levin's breezy polyrhythmic energy. Attractive enough, but rather disappointing for those who've come to expect the unconventional from this personnel.

CHRIS BLACKFOOT

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## The Deviants

Demants #3  
CAPTAIN JACK (CD) 061 CD

## Poetics

Remixes Of Recordings 1977-1983  
COMPANIES LIMITED (CD) 1273 3CD

The Deviants were the house group for the 60s UK freak scene based at the Notting Hill Gate end of Swinging London. Led by ex *International Times* scribe Mick Farren, with support from, among others, guitarist Paul Rudolph and drummer Russell Hurst (both Pink Fancies) they exploded out of nowhere, proudly wearing aloft their self-produced debut album *Poetry* under the noses of anyone who had chosen to not take them seriously.

At the time *Poetry* caused a mini sensation with its (then) radical rock approach — which owed more to The Mothers Of Invention and The Fugs than to the Beatles or Pink Floyd — and (more memorably) its gaudy fold-out *Deviants*-like Pop Art poster cover.

Leaving #3 — with its notorious ice-cream-sucking turn cover — originally came out on Transatlantic. Three time round, the group were running out of steam: their original spark was fading fast. Yet the occasional spurt of warped genius can still be heard "Black, George Does It With His Tongue" is a mad, vaguely driven drum solo that voodooically pokes fun at all those pompous supergroup rock rituals that serve all but the most stick rats scurrying to the bar, while "Billy The Monster" and "Metamorphosis Explorer" are rambling examples of The Deviants at their anarchic best. What with its dope references and groupie groggings, however, the rest of the record has unfortunately aged badly.

Much more interesting is the triple CD set from Poetics, an Ann Arbor-based art school group from the mid-70s which included line artist and ex-Detroit All Monsters manager Mike Kelley in their ranks as drummer, organ player and noise maker.

The same experimentation with vocals and subversive playing techniques that dominated early psychedelic Stooges performances ripple like lightning under the surface. Only Poetics have a stronger sense of the surreal, and their musical humour is burnt black around the edges. Their mission was to unpick rock's shroud to see what it was made of, only to unconsciously nip it to shreds. They do the same thing to contemporary electronic music (loquaciously reeking Morton Subotnick's greatest hit on "Silver Oranges Of The Moon") and even (lovingly) Sun Ra. Their punny treatment of his "Rocket #9" may be a scaled-down Toys 'R Us version of the *Arkestra*'s 60s prototype, but it still manages an effective enough blast off. An impressive document, best experienced by periodically diving in and getting out once you've had enough.

EDWIN POWELL

## Thomas Dimuzio

Sonicism  
BARRACLOUGH (CD) 202 2CD

## Solarus

Empty Nature  
RELEASE 1999/05 CD

## Flux

Protoplastic  
RELEASE 08/04/04 CD

Water sagitt, analogue synth, trumpet, thunderstorm, shrinkwrap machine, broken water pipe, MIDI controlled audio processors, black hex, a few of the items used by Boston based composer Dimuzio in making this double CD of soundworks. That's not to say it's a sonic free-for-all: Dimuzio is after coherence. Most of the samples are treated beyond recognition before they're allowed to enter his rich, web narratives. So, when on "Autokartan" a brief slice of dance pumping intrudes, it's a shock — everything else proceeds without such clanking rhythmic intrusions. Anything this inclusive gives off a dome of warmth, despite the inescapably somber tone of some of the atmospheres. It's dense and strikingly textured after, the only downside being that it might provoke feelings of h-fi inadequacy.

*Solarus* and *Flux* both involve avant guitarist James Pluton. Although only billed as "additional musician" with *Solarus*, basically the duo of Kipp Johnson and (Bill) Yurkewich, his casual, drifting work here is the dominant voice on an album otherwise mostly made up of simple bass and drum parts and wispery synth atmospheres. Quiet and directionless, it strives for a hypnotic effect but in the end it is defeated by its over-tempered passivity. There are occasional dubby percussion gestures, but the work would be enhanced by a bit more happening in the mix.

The *Flux* album, produced by Mick Harris, is more interesting. This time the music is all

Pluton's own work, and the guitar receives rockier backing. He more aggressively plays is directed into sharp, looping statements. The spoken word passages, written and delivered by Ruth Collins in an uninviting monotone, don't do much for the music. The glossy guitar parts are far away the album's most enticing aspect. Though the bass and percussion resolve clearly enough, their function is to provide a launchpad for the bliss-inducing fragmenting that lies in the top lines.

WILL MONTGOMERY

## Dissolve

Third Album For The Sun  
GRAMMY GRAMMY (CD) 016 CD

## Philosopher's Stone

Preparation  
GRAMMY GRAMMY (CD) 010 CD

Dissolve are a New Zealand based duo comprising guitarists Ray Montgomery and

Chris Heaphy who set base musical elements — guitars, bass and organ — rotating in their own space with 20 drums to give them forward momentum. "Pressure Too Far" features the bleached vocals of Joanne Woodward (of The Sods), backed by tremolo guitars and Farfisa organ (sounding uncannily like Pink Floyd's Dick Wright on *Unsung Heroes*). Despite their basic instrumentation, Dissolve have few antecedents, although Felix sometimes collaborated similar areas.

Only occasionally does the magic become prosaic. The duo have an intuitive knack of locking two-chord changes and timbre into a repetitive, shifting structure. When the massed guitars, bass and skirling Farfisa lock together on the magnificent opener, "Rogue Satellite", it forms an aural portal to the other side. I know that sounds naive — I've just laughed myself — but listen to this fantastic music and you'll hear what I mean.

Philosopher's Stone is Amp's Gareth Mitchell. Preparation has a similar effect to Dissolve, though it's resolutely non-rock. It's constructed from loops generated by guitar, percussion and all manner of concrete sources. These can sound like footfalls through a spectral landscape, as on "Through Palisade Trees". High-tuned wedges of teeth-grating noises are occasionally drilled into the mix for short durations, as on "Places Where The Mind Dies". They might be nothing compared to Herdow or KK Null, but in this context they're just you keeping for the volume control. Such disorientating blends aside, Preparation is sparse music that works at least 50 per cent by implying something that is not there. Elsewhere, when Mitchell flexes his voice on "Where Rainbows End", it sounds for a moment like Scott Walker singing with The Hafler Trio. It's a shame he didn't make greater use of this combination.

MIKE RABINS

## Étage 34

3380/0000 5607 CD

## Soukates Etages

Die Sa. Bouche Die Loup  
3380/0000 0008 CD

Free rock (or even avant rock) might be virtually extinct in the UK of the 90s, but it's still very much alive and kicking in France. Étage 34 and its bigger brother Soukates Etages began in the early 80s. The pool of musicians associated with these groups have since become key activists in French experimental music, particularly in the fertile Nancy scene. "I" is a similar proposition to its predecessor *Esorde* (1995), the duo of Daniel Koskowitz, Olivier Paquette and Dominique Repasard continues an assault on the eardrums with their relentless high energy, high density improvised rock. Unlike Heavy Metal

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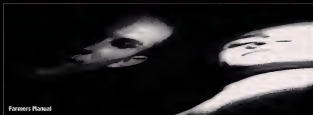
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**Farmers Manual**

lock

IRON 7 CD

Three blasts of trulent Germanic Electronica with a common attraction to noise. Peter Kraut (see Bates, *The Wire* 161) is a jazz-soaked resident of Berne, an organiser of the adventurous Taktlos festival, and a former member of Kevin Martin's multi-stranded noise throbbers God. A downbeat feel characterises the music: the blurred outlines of HipHop are everywhere evident, the drum patterns superimposed with mangled, unrecognisable samples. The sound is rough textured and sparse. Distortion is a fundamental tool. The rhythmic Kraut establishes are fairly rigid, but what drags you into the music are the noises. While the rhythmic feel derived from the bruised and corrupted HipHop sometimes lock the music down, the growling splatters of treated sound thrown into the mix are where the music really engages. Sometimes the unwanted glee of, say, tortured Hammond or distressed vibes obscures the warming electronics growing through the piece. But if the 'jazzier' sound grows don't in the end, work as interestingly as the album's more brutal ingredients, it is a clever



Farmers Manual

assembled arrangement of sounds nonetheless. Former rock musician Christian Fennesz brings guitars to his music, a kind of stretched, suspended meeting of rock and Techno. The two affect each other in various ways. At times he approaches the enigmatic sweep of Man, at others the music drifts into looping dance patterns or settles into a kind of active drone before switching to cuncous, wisemose, guitar drawn song sections. It's hard to locate precisely what motors the music, but a starting point might be the humming consonance deep in both dance and rock. In any case the diverse inputs on the album are thoughtfully integrated. Although the music is partly about the allure of repetition, it never loses its ever evolving, organic feel.

Visiting the Farmers Manual website the other evening to look at the live video link with the FM workshop, perhaps to witness the beginnings of one of their 'legendary all-night sessions', I found that the musicianship explorers were nowhere in sight, though the FM car could dimly be seen settling down among the hardware. It was a strange intrusion of

domesticity, given the roughness of the music. Farmers Manual produce. However, first impressions of a recklessly jagged enterprise give in to pleasure at a playful, provisional music made of eccentric, twisted drum patterns and scratchy analogue sounds. It sounds quite casually assembled but the work is alive with iconoclastic energy. Like both the above albums a core part of their approach is in shredding familiar sounds, but FM bring a liberating irresponsibility to what they do. The samples are slung in almost casually. Levels see-saw (reminding you how rarely they do, with tracks ranging from a very quiet ten minute ooze to one whose tones are pitched painfully loud and high. Their open, train-set approach to the technology is what makes this Viennese collective so strong, and the music arises apart the linear, programmatic associations of so much popular machine music. Oh, and tracks 16 to 98 are mere looped squeaks, drawn out over five minutes, in a digital rediscovery of vinyl's bendish locked groove technique. Unmoving

**WILL MONTGOMERY**

group, however, Stage 34's wall of sound aesthetic provides plenty of vertically layered textural detail without smothering the music's powerful linear thrust. Repetitive polyrhythmic guitar evokes the tedium of monumental rifting, while Koskiewicz's unpredictable polyrhythmic activity brings him closer to Elvin Jones than Cory Powell. Those with dodgy wackers beware: Paquette's awesome bass guitar

Solvente Ensembles consists of the aforementioned two members, plus Yves Botz, Jacques Debout and Francois Dietz. Their last album, *Revolutionary Suicide* (1994), included a free jazz input from saxophonist Diarrik Lazro, for De So Bouche De Loue (From His Wolf Mouth) they've recruited musician/composer specialist Jérôme Noetinger who, like Botz and Debout, wields electronics, records, and tapes of found sounds. The group's music now has a broader sweep with more complex and unpredictable shifts in density, dynamics and timbre, while maintaining the edge-of-seat uncertainty of real-time improvisation. Important and exciting work by inventive musicians.

**CHRIS BLACKFORD**

**Susanna Ferrar**

A Day Leaves Home

PMH 004 CD

**Phil Durrant**

Soprano

ACTA 10 CD

Opportunity knocks for those two seasoned British improv walkers, both of whom are making their solo album debuts. Susanna Ferrar has appeared on albums by Sylvia Hallert, Lol Coxhill and on Sam's Women With Voices compilation. Like Hallert's 1992 solo debut for Miah, A Day Leaves Home presents Ferrar working in a variety of settings — solos, duos, environmental soundbites. Where the formal worked for Hallert, whose distinctive abilities as a composer and improviser unified the diverse strands, it seems inappropriate for Ferrar, who is less disbarred across the range. Too much here is embryonic, and some of Ferrar's vocal folk-inspired borders on the twee. Best are the improvised duets, where her thoughtfully judged folk inflections (on violin) engage in a playfully shy dialogue with Evon Parker's luscious soprano sax. Coxhill and

Hallert also make guest appearances.

Phil Durrant is well respected by admirers of top-notch UK improvising groups such as Chris Burn Ensemble, News From The Street, and his trio with John Butcher and John Russell. But this is the first time I've heard him solo. Sowon includes five improvisations within structures for acoustic violin, and five for violin transformed by electronics. The acoustic pieces, where Durrant really pushes the instrument into new areas of expression, imaginatively explore a particular texture or developmental process. '303 202 101', a homage to Roland analogue synths, bears a remarkable resemblance to Evan Parker's seamless, circular breathing improvisations on soprano sax. 'Sowai (For Violin)' slowly evolves by the subtle shifts in gradations of texture, while 'Wingbacks' unleashes the sort of extreme, traumatic tones you'd expect from an electric guitar. Less compelling are the electronic transformations, which, though intermittently fascinating, as continuous pieces lack sufficient cohesion to hold the attention. Even so, Durrant deserves greater international recognition.

**CHRIS BLACKFORD**

**Soliman Gamil**

A Map Of Egypt Before The Sands

TOUCH 133 15 CD

**Mahmoud Fadl**

The Drummers Of The Nile

PMH 004 131 147 CD

In the sleeve notes to *A Map Of Egypt Before The Sands*, Egyptian composer Soliman Gamil describes his homeland as 'the starting point in the evolution of musical civilisation'. He is talking specifically about melodic instruments such as the nay, a flute made out of a reed, rather than drums which were probably developed a few thousand miles to the south well before the beginnings of ancient Egyptian civilisation. This aspect linking of Egyptian music to the Western tradition is made clear in Gamil's music, a surprisingly successful fusion of the acuity of Middle Eastern scales and the sweetness of European melody.

*A Map Of Egypt* is a compilation of tracks from Gamil's two previous Touch albums, *The Egyptian Music* and *Arabic*, in which traditional Egyptian instruments sit alongside elements from the orchestral spectrum. On some



tracks, Gaml uses flutes and oboes to double Egyptian instruments like the *salsama* (a flute) and the *mouzzmar* (a reed instrument), on others any hint of Egyptology is avoided by keeping the two separate — the trumpet pounds away like it's still on duty for the 1812 Overture while the folk musicians are left alone to do their thing. For punts, there are tracks where there is no Western influence whatsoever; otherwise, the most interesting explorations of tone and timbre occur under conditions of forced osmosis.

Mahmoud Fadl takes the exact opposite track and downplays any melodic sensibility in favour of rhythm. Featuring rhythms from the Nubian region in the south to Cairo in the north, *Drummers Of The Nile* feels almost like an Egyptian version of *Ultimate Blues And Broke*. Reveling in the minute distinctions between, say, the 'Hagala' beat and the 'Falahi' rhythm, *Drummers Of The Nile* is a compendium of Egyptian swing that allows both the uninitiated and scholars to get their grooves on to the undeniable pulse of the qemba and darabuka. Despite the presence of old and accented intermissions, the album might be a bit too one-dimensional, the rhythms really move on their own, but the real magic lies in their interaction with the keening melodies.

PETER SHAPING

**Grateful Dead**  
*Fullout From The Phil Zone*  
GRATEFUL DEAD CDCC 4052 2CD

**Grateful Dead**  
*Dick's Picks Volume 7*  
GRATEFUL DEAD CDCC 4031 3CD

This far down the line, it's difficult to believe that Grateful Dead got their teeth playing the Bay Area ballroom circuit, before they started writing on their own material, their early to late 60s sets were built out by extended jams on blues, rock 'n' roll and Motown hits. Now the idea of ballrooms full of acid-fied freaks copping dancing to The Dead using track of time and space 17 minutes into, say, Wilson Pickett's 'In The Midnight Hour', might not jive well with contemporary definitions of pagan

ance music. There again, getting locked in a computer programmed groove for hours on end is all well and good for dancing on the spot, but The Dead knew the difference between getting lost in music and going pleasantly numb through mindless repetition. To hear their great, stumpling, erratic forays onto the dancefloor some 30 years later, is to experience afresh the thrill of losing the dimension through a microdot and ending up who knows where. The outstanding passages of *Fullout From The Phil Zone* — based Phil Lesh's personal travel of highlights buried in their live archives, from 1967-1995 — are extraordinary soundbites of song styles and improvisations that could only have happened in that short period of grace in the 60s, before pop had fractured into mutually hostile marketing niches. Given his commitment elsewhere to experimental music, his concentration on R&B, blues and soul covers is surprising. But with 'Voile Lee Blues', Pickett's 'Midnight Hour', Otis Redding's 'Hard To Handle' and the Vangelis hit 'Dance In The Street' (recorded between 1967-70), his selection underlines how they were far more potent releasing their improvisatory energies through the gradual liquification of a song's boundaries. These takes also make it clear how much the group would later miss their relatively straight man, vocal/keyboards player Ron Pigpen.

McKernan: He might not have been able to keep up with the others' rapid musical progress, but his alcohol-fuelled soufflé lit the torch that guided the group back to earth once they'd exhausted themselves exploring a song's outer reaches. Nothing on Dick's Picks Vol 7, recorded Pigeonhole at London's Alexandra Palace in 1974, matches the excitement generated on Lesh's prime cuts. Former Dead manager Scotty's recall of the use, in his book *Jump With The Dead*, makes it clear why the group were completely burnt out by a nonstop touring schedule. Now drugs were no longer a means of mind expansion but a crutch. Though the songs just sound as standing, it is because pretty much the whole Dead touring set-up is leaning heavily on amounts of cocaine. The combination of sustained roadwork and uppers has scoured the life out

of this set. Of course, The Dead would periodically redouble the fluidity, and their way back to the musical dissolves throughout their career, as the later material — most specifically a tender version of 'Visions Of Johanna' from 1995 — on *Phil Zone* demonstrates. But anyone looking for proof that — in Robert David's immortal line from *Apocalypse Now* — Charlie don't surf can turn into the unrelenting spectacle of The Dead slowly sinking beneath waves of tedium at Alexandra Palace.

NBA ROFF

**Keith Jarrett**  
*La Scala*  
RCA 1640 CD

**Paul Bley**  
*Handa On*  
EVIDENCE ECD 22184 CD

There are few turns *Waxer* to draw fire from anti-jazzers than solo pianists, the self-indulgence that many read into the form seems at its most extreme when the likes of Jarrett and Bley start their endless marathons. This musical barbarism, of course, has often served to make them play all the better accusations of musical hubris any like challenges, to which Jarrett especially has risen to on many occasions. This time, however, both he and Bley are found wanting. Bley's *Alone On* is marginally the less culpable of the two. He's always been a delicate player, a less-is-more man. Usually high octave virtuosity is a means rather than an end in his idiosyncratic melodic and harmonic world. On the opener,

'Remembering', and the odd 'Ram Dance', for example, the serene bluesy meditations of the introductory chords are slowly but surely unravelled and led away into a much more unsettling musical world, overcast and menacing, with machine-gunned selves of black notes inavertently jolting and jarring the listener. But lightning bolts between thoughtful exploration and thoughtless exposition is a dangerous game, and all things considered, Bley probably does us all a favour — not least himself — by bringing in

the album at a little under 53 minutes.

Jarrett, on the other hand, doesn't brook timidity. Where Bley is reserved, formal and taciturn, Jarrett is apocryphically animated. This goes for the quantity of his music as well as its quality. *La Scala* covers a full 76 minutes and quite frankly has barely enough ideas to adequately fill half that amount. The much vaunted encore of 'Over The Rainbow' is meltingly gorgeous, but the damage is done by then. The two massive stretches of pianistic rumination that precede it are lacking in authority and colour and even, on occasion, commitment. In a style as forlorn as Jarrett's, this is a cardinal sin.

Jarrett's numerous forays into the format (Köln Concert, Sun Bear Concerts, etc) have all been conducted with a mighty self-discipline. Even at his most diffuse, there was always a sense of direction about Jarrett's playing on those earlier records. The artist, indeed, managed to force the listener to believe that those fey lances had a point to them. But that was then. Now, Jarrett is running on empty and, its technical triumph notwithstanding (the soft chromatic figures at the heart of 'La Scala II' are some of the most tender Jarrett's yet produced) this one feels like he's set the controls to cruise.

PAUL STUPP

**Love Cry Want**  
*Love Cry Want*  
NEW JAZZ NYC 001 CD

**Don Cherry**  
*Brotherhood Suite*  
FLUSH MUSIC FLED-4 CD

**Sun Ra And His**  
**Intergalactic Arkestra**  
*Stardust From Tomorrow*  
LED CD LR 2152 36 3CD

Ohland I can't think of any valid reasons why Joe Galvin is not more celebrated. He worked with well heavy gazers like Eric Dolphy, Gil Evans and Wilson Pickett, participated in a longstanding duo with Charles Austin, and ran an admirable outfit, the Neon Lighthouse and the Soldiers Of The Road, in whose ranks warriors



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**Material**  
Temporary Music  
CHARLY GPC02085 CD

**Material**  
Memory Serves  
CHARLY GPC02085 CD

**Material**  
One Down  
CHARLY GPC02082 CD

**Bill Laswell**  
Baselines  
CHARLY GPC02084 CD

Of this slew of Material releases the earliest, *Temporary Music*, is for completists only, being well titled as very much a product of its time. The year is 1979, Material is a basic unit of Bill Laswell, Michael Benham and Fred Maher, and the opening number, "QAO," sounds like something ZZ Top might have produced as incidental music for *Flashdance*. Later sessions, from 1980 and 1981, find little new to say, and its hard to imagine anyone now being taken with this tired strain of Alt-Rock Disco.

*Memory Serves* dates from 1981, and what a difference a year makes. Well, a year plus the additional input of Sonny Sharrock, Fred Firth, Henry Threadgill, George Lewis, Olu Dara, Billy Bang, and Charles K. Noyes. Sure, it still sounds like 1981, but suddenly the year doesn't sound so bad, with Material much less a slave to four square rhythm. The coda of "Disappearing" has Dara's trumpet and Laswell's guttural bassline riding on a wave of hi-hat, echoing Miles's *On The Corner*. The next track features Bang's wolo and Firth's guitar in a mutant disco hoo-down, while the next is more self-consciously avant garde. Overall, *Memory Serves* manages to be both hip and cheesy. The closing tracks go further, forging a distinctive Material identity which, although not as refined as that of *Habakukin Engine* over a decade later, compensates with an unbounded sense of possibility.

Sadly, this series is betrayed by 1983's *One Down*, the tard in Material's punchbowl. Out goes Fred Firth, in comes Nile Rodgers, and the compromised dollar bill on the cover



Bill Laswell

is as good a symbol of the outing as any. Actually, the two tracks featuring Nile Rodgers are the best, presumably because he has a strong musical identity and a direction of his own to impose. The mildly infamous "Memories" unites Whitney Houston and saxophonist Archie Shepp to very little positive effect. The remainder is a pallid, soulless pop fusion.

Laswell's next move was to drop the Material tag and record under his own name. *Baselines* still features Benham, but Maher is out. Firth and Lewis guest again, as do percussionists Ronald Shannon Jackson and David Moss, and saxophonist Ralph Carney. Here Laswell displays his distinctive deep, queasy basslines to good effect, and his is the bed-rock on which everything else rests. Its unadorned, cliché-free take on the strain of funk jazz fusion constitutes the protean precursor of Laswell's hallmark sound, although the closing "Conversation" comes closer to a playful Zorn/Eye duet than to his polished work on Axiom.

**TIM OWEN**

have arrived at free music before anyone else. Having bluesy exotisms and mystical anarchy, he sometimes got the blend wrong, but not at this 1989 opus. Star turns include Earl Smith, Marshall Allen, June Tyson, and Julian Presser. You'll wish you'd been there.

**BARRY WITKIN**

**Wynton Marsalis & The Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra**  
*Blond On The Fields*  
COLUMBIA C051694 CD

Wynton Marsalis's music may not be the typical *Wire* reader's first choice. Wynton has his fair share of detractors who make much of his, or more precisely his advocates' bumptious insouciance on his being some kind of keeper of the eternal flame of jazz. Yet there is no denying Marsalis's facility as a musician, and in recent times he has been forging ahead as a composer, working on commissions for increasingly large ensembles in a variety of performance genres. *Blond On The Fields* is an apotheosis of this process, a three CD, three hour jazz opera on the theme of slavery.

In the 15-strong Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, James Carter deserves takes the far share of the limelight with some rich, earthy blowing on baritone sax and clarinet. But attention, however, will inevitably fall on Cassandra Wilson and Miles Griffith in the lead vocal roles of Jesse and Leona, prince and commoner, sold into slavery and transported to America. Jon Hendricks has the dubious pleasure of being cast in the third vocal role of Jesse, a wise man in the guise of a fool who oversees Jesse's conversion to Strong Black Americanism. The subject is treated with a due measure of gravity and feeling, which doesn't prevent the sentiment from cloying, but that's opera for you. More importantly, the music embraces modernity in its respect for the jazz tradition, which means that it can encompass both Rollins/Roland Kirk and Duke Ellington as models for syncretism and evolution in the music. Over the full three hours the composition sprawls a little and attention may wander, but then this is an altogether more earthy and open-ended music than we have come to expect from Wynton's pen. The title track itself is a typically raw, gamine performance.

**TIM OWEN**

**Maurizio**  
Maurizio  
MAURIZIO CD

**Vainqueur**  
Civilians  
CIVILIAN REACTION GPD 02 CD

When Berlin Teffno label Basic Channel terminated operations, their mission presumably fulfilled, with the release of their solitary CD, they might not have intended it as

like (even Parker, Steve Wilkoson, Paul Durrant and Guy Barker served).

Gulliver helped Robert Hood develop the drum synthesizer. With Love Guy Warr, an innovative group led by the legendary mono-maniacal Nicholas, he played drums, steel guitar and synth alongside percussionist Jimmy Matien and organist Larry Young. In June 1972, when LCW played in Lafayette Park, across from the White House, Nicholas was lead-driving a prototype guitar synthesizer. Neighbour Richard Nixon, alarmed by the strange sounds, used to get the concert stopped. Where Presidential pressure failed, record industry limbo succeeded: the tapes were suppressed until now. Nixon would have liked to know how that was done.

In the 70s most jazz organists fell into one of two camps — funky (the Jimmy Smith model, later re-sprayed and welded onto the *Ace of Jazz* channel) or key (the money *Nice* Coltrane party) — but by 1972 Young was beating other pairs, and is best known for his contribution to fusion with Miles, Lifetime and John McLaughlin. LCW learned from late 60s Miles, but they played much looser music, and Young capstones on this. These raw, frenzied, adventurous performances show what fusion might have been, and can stand alongside the best of Young's Blue Note cuts as a convincing memorial.

Don Cherry's Brotherhood Five contains more retrieved concepts. The five tracks span seven years (1968-74), four venues, and

varying personnel. There is superb work by Bent Rønsbo on four pieces, and it's interesting to hear Torbjørn Holtz (the bewildered bassist on Albert Ayler's last recordings in 1964) taking the new music in his stride. Cherry plays impressively throughout. There's no question of scraping the barrel: this collection of live performances puts some of his studio sessions of the time in the shade.

Sun Ra took the occasion of creating his own legend, his own system of mythology, during his lifetime. It names define determinism/Herman/Sonny-Lee Blount took pre-emptive action, assuming the title of a deity but letting things call him Mr. Mystery. He pioneered electronic keyboards in the 1950s, and may

a tombstone erected to mark vinyl's passing, but since then the surviving operation has tempered its extreme prejudice against the digital format. Further down the chain of command, CD releases by Chan Reaction artists are perhaps less of a surprise — even so, Vanquisher's is only the second — but a disc from one of BC's main men, but most passionate of vinyl proselytizers, Maurizio (aka Monty Von Dweidel), still feels tantamount to apostasy.

Yet on closer scrutiny, Maurizio is less an act of renunciation than a continuation of the war for vinyl by other means. The compilation is extracted from the later sequence of Maurizio 12"s, from M4 through to the simultaneously issued vinyl slice M7, which it troles twice with an edit and an unreleased mix. For, like the Basic Channel CD, Maurizio works brilliantly in its own right as a home listening disc, yet the edit label stickered over seven of the nine tracks is a tantalizing reminder that these versions are incomplete. Somewhere out there are the authoritative director's cuts. It has to be said that Maurizio has a point about the direct compression of the CD with the original reveals that, not only is the depth of sound considerably reduced in digital form, but you also lose the sheer physical tug of the stylus cutting into the groove. What you gain on CD, however, is a clearer impression of the symmetrical perfection of Maurizio's dance designs. They begin like the abstracted swirl of Kraftwerk's *Trans Europa Express*. They're then tightly syncopated and turned slowly through a cycle that almost imperceptibly starts slipping out of sync. That is, all the time the tracks seem to be moving in a direct line, they're actually shearing off in a more intriguing direction. The asymmetrical effect Maurizio introduces into his perfect symmetries is heightened with mild skank club elements. The combination was so beautifully released on "H5" and "H6" — best

examples of the distance of the 12"s, but they still work well in the context — that they're moodily hard acts to follow. Following similar archetypic principles, the "H7" tracks trailered here are worth the wait. Stuck right in the middle of the disc is a take of the Dominie single mix, which Maurizio undertook for a side project of former Ash Ra Tempel guitarist Manuel Gotschling. Its stripped minimalism completely baffled the original artist, who inevitably rejected it. Possibly for good reason. It flows more readily into the M1 bloodstream than it does into Gotschling's waveform. The "Y" Maurizio superimposed over that release's lead (reproduced on the cheap tin crayon box BC limited disc) now packaged in it resembles the M of the child murderer in Fritz Lang's thriller *M*. A coincidence or an ironic acknowledgement of Maurizio's violation of the Dominie origins? Be warned. This is the land of dangerous speculation: the mystery surrounding the Basic Channel's "H7" set leads you to

Maurizio once perpetrated an astonishing earthquake mix of a Vanquisher track, "Uyl", the impact of which was so profound, it's

taken Vanquisher's Rene Lowe a succession of self-effacing 12" releases on Chan Reaction to conquer its memory. Constructed around various versions of "Elevation", with two takes of "Solitude" and one each of "Reduce" and "Antarctic" folded in, his first full-length CD eventually feels more at home with itself than Maurizio's. Perhaps it's because he's worked it up from more lived-in materials. It sounds like he has heavily processed solid choral voices into the dense blocks from which he constructs his rhythm tracks. His rhythm meshes are not so tightly knit as Maurizio's, but they're strung together from weirder DNA. When a mail order ad once mispelt the artist "Van Quier", they were perhaps onto something. The unintended vanity slant aside, there is something so slippery about Vanquisher's quivered pitches his music is positively erotic.

**BIBA KOPF**

## Medeski Martin And Wood

SHOCK! SHOCK!  
GMA/HANSON GCD59514 CD

## Medeski Martin And Wood

Bubblehouse  
GMA/HANSON GCD591001 CD

Hard to believe that Medeski Martin And Wood could make it to Shad-wan, their fourth album, without garnering a higher profile in the UK. In the United States they have outgrown the coffee house circuit and now play in arenas. This may be a shame for their audience, but it's no more than they deserve. Central to their sound is John Medeski's Hammond B-3 organ, but the group interaction as a whole is highly impressive. Drummer Billy Martin and bassist Chris Wood's contributions to the group's spacious, second nature improvisations and blunt grooves are equally decisive. Unlike Porcupine, whose sex pulp rhythm line up may invite comparison, Medeski Martin And Wood do not play to inverted notions of pop cultural hysteria. While the Porcupine sax sound plays explicit homage to their JBs and noir influences, Medeski's is a distinctly new voice on the Hammond, and stylistically his work on the clavinet or the Wuritzer electric piano is very much part of a specific musical conception, not merely a recourse to other textures. I should think that the recording process, for which the group convened an Hawaiian shack with no electricity into an improvised recording studio, also contributed significantly to the sound and success of the recording, which manages to be simultaneously focused and laidback.

The additional tracks on a new EP, *Bubblehouse*, arguably the happiest item in your local record store, invite some interesting comparisons. Beside a *Shad-wan* outtake set two remixed by the illiberal collective, *Wie*, and a third by DJ Logic with a saxophone contribution by John Zorn. On the latter,

Logic's mix heightens the languorous mood while Zorn produces slow, sensual lines. We should be more uneasy partners, their urban dypsops piled against PPHW's tropical funk, but even their "1D 00 PM With Mr. Orion" mix of "Sey Kist" is cool and lazy.

**TIM OWEN**

## Merzbow/Gore Beyond Necropsy

Rectal Anarchy  
RELEASE RR 6952 CD

## Aube/Katsumi/Kosakai

Monde Bruta  
JAPAN OVERSEAS JO 97-27 CD

## Yuragi

Yakusoku No Chu (Promised Land)  
GREATMANN DISC CDPC 00030 CD

Say, is that a 5D CD Merzbow box set in your pocket, or are you just pleased to be erecting a monumental monument of the box set? *Yakusoku No Chu* (The Promise of the Future) is planning such a box set will certainly leave some of us gasping and spent, clutching our flaccid wallets. Dr. It's this sagging sexual innuendo is not to your taste, perhaps you'll get on better with the anal antics of *Rectal Anarchy*. This is a typically frenzied collaboration between nose boss Merzbow and the lethargically named *Gore Beyond Necropsy*, who are a Japanese five piece. Dr. Industrial Pulse Grinder is credited with "hermudous faecal butchery." Track seven (there are 31) is titled "Sole Crutch Disorder Rectal Anarchy", and track 13 is "Melin & Mounds Retard 'Mosh Anarchy'." Do you need more? Behind the CD is a naughty photo of a microphone nesting between two buttocks. To be fair, the CD artwork is very good, and mainly consists of punky video images of a Japanese striptease group.

The first track lasts 24 minutes, and is a scalding shower of fuzz and roaring recorded live at LaMama, Tokyo. The other (studio) tracks are also 15's. It's a musical environment so extreme that music cannot survive in it. Listening, even at low volume, I feel like a puny human facing attack from vastly superior aliens — my weapons are useless against them. But surely these people hate music?

Well, maybe not. The Aube/Monde Bruta album is a collection of four Japanese nose specialists trying their hand at something a bit lighter. "A new shade of ambience from Japanese harsh noise creator?" exclaims the sleeve. *Aube* makes crazy scented noises from the sounds of brain waves and an electroencephalogram. Katsumi Sugihara from the group *Solima* does a dark warm analogue synth thing. Kuma Kosaka from *Incandescent* dreams an intriguing twilight zone by applying effects to double bass and bowed percussion. *Monde Bruta*, gently bleep and bleep their way through some sinewaves and *Herndon* plays 'pulp and regurgitation' crap, that's the other CD. The whole album is

## NEW RELEASES ON

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**μ-Ziq**  
Lunatic Harness  
PLANET PIANET CORUS CD/EP

**Squarepusher**  
Big Load  
WARP WAPSD2 CD/12

There's more being harnessed on the new **μ-Ziq** CD than creator Mike Paradinas's lunacy. Tempting though it is to focus on the extreme breakfast experimentation, it would be wrong to ignore the frequent affinities with Aphex Twin-styled symphonic Electronica. And though to these ears "Wannabe," with the year's most unlikely Spice Girls reference, sounds like Tom Waits meets zoviet France, spotting soundalikes is a spurious game. What needs to be said about Paradinas is that he's a true original. He may borrow from the syntax of the musical languages surrounding him, but these elements are then reprogrammed in a cyber language, spoken in tongues. Its tempting to latch onto elements like the frenetic drum 'n' bass, or the passages of becalmed Electro ambience, which best fit with our understanding, but it's better to surrender yourself and go with the flow. Sometimes this can be scary, but it's always thrilling to find yourself in a new place. So thrilling, in fact, that Paradinas music may be one of the few modern art forms where overt allusions and references seem like betrayals of his promise, as when exploring the music of an exotic or other culture, only to discern a juncture synthesizer in the mix. But again, it's spacious to hold these moments against **μ-Ziq** when the music is so vital, so far ahead of the game.

It's tempting to see Paradinas and Tom Jenkinson (aka Squarepusher) as fellow travelers in breakfast synergies, although their music accentuates quite different influences. With Paradinas's HipHop With Jenkinson's Techno. Compare "Lunatic Harness" with "Full Rise (Featuring MC Tein Tub)" from Squarepusher's "Big Load" for the best illustration. You'll find "Big Load" in the singles rack in your record shops, a typically generous EP from Warp, containing at just under half an hour with seven new tracks. Typical, too, that it weighs in as strong as that on his last full-length album, *How Normal Daddy*. The stand-out "Come On My Selector" is the knockout, the most ridiculously virtuosic display of the "Pusher's" meld of slapped bass and manic breakdowns yet committed to record.

TIM OWEN

coloured by a pleasant naivety, though it's conceptually more complex than the monolithic racket these guys usually deal in. Yuragi is the project of guitarist Hidetoshi Kaneda, who has assembled musicians from noise groups Incapacities, CCCC, Ciconia and Zeno Kestus. The album switches from minimal percussion to thrashy free jazz, via nondescript rock riffing with scuffling guitar solos. I don't like any of it, but I think the bits I like least are the strummed 12 string guitar with Tibetan drone singing. Don't give up the noise day job.

CLIVE BELL

**Dominic Maldowney**  
Piano Concerto/Saxophone Concerto  
EMI CLASSICS 7243 566528 CD

**Paul Patterson**  
Concerto For Orchestra/Europborry/Missa Brevis  
EMI CLASSICS 7243 66529 CD

Although neither Dominic Maldowney nor Paul Patterson deserve the entire terrible reputation that some sort upon these (less than mighty) British composers, there are, perhaps, certain aspects to consider. Prime among them is that both manifest an unusual and commendable desire to go against any discernible flow whatsoever. They don't shock (like Turnage), they don't give great soundbites (like Steve Marland), they don't follow any school of -isms (start list now...) There is a sense, in both these composers' repertoires, of original works created as both response and protest to previous generations and music.

Manikied so in the case of Patterson's release, which takes in a stringent choral work, an orchestral piece commissioned by The European Community Orchestra and the dominating orchestral concerto. These might sound quite rare. Previously a champion of composers like Penderecki and Lutoskiwski, Patterson's own work had reflected many of the singular devices that these Poles (and others, principally Ligeti) used to produce a particularly shimmering harmonic fragrance. This stopped when Patterson, prompted perhaps by his academic teaching experience, felt communication could be more direct if it was less abusive. This is a contentious area, nevertheless there is plenty to consider in Patterson's new style. Beyond the wealthiness of Eurico Brevis or the playfulness of Eurico, it's the concerto that holds out most ideas. It's applied though with themes and motifs to create a dense and dynamic work.

Two concertos from Maldowney (one for piano and BBC Symphony Orchestra, the other for saxophone soloist John Harle with The London Sinfonietta), show just how dense the communication issue has become. Maldowney, who has been involved in numerous Brecht/Weill projects and has much

film scoring under his belt, writes with a firm ear on reality themes, precise rhythms and a hold on complex lines. The atmosphere of the six concertos is changeable, almost episodic, as to development passes through numerous configurations before bursting out in a swing tempo and accompanying brood strokes. The piano work, all the more sober for its modal undertones, is controlled and reflective. Rewarding, but also interesting as a piece written from within the heart as opposed to the fringes.

LOUISE GRAY

**David Murray Quartet**  
Long Goodbye  
ONE 910 CD

**David Murray**  
Fo Death Revue  
JAZZ TIME JUST 34 CD

Long Goodbye is a tribute to Don Pullen, who died in 1995. Murray first recorded with him in 1977 as a member of Low Class. Conspiracy and went on to employ him on the *Home Children* and, on origin, the *Shuttl* albums. It's a pity more of their work together isn't preserved, as both musicians so keenly interrogate and build on jazz tradition. Unfortunately, *Long Goodbye* doesn't do much to retrospectively plug the gap. Pullen's four compositions don't travel very well, and the aching harmonic "Butch" Morris composition is the most memorable piece of writing. Pianist DD Jackson, a former Pullen pupil, acquits himself well, but Murray is of course the dominant voice. However, though his rich language can still sound great, it doesn't seem to move forward well, often like "forward" are grey areas with Murray's radical hold on the past. Perhaps the most affecting playing comes on the sparse scoring of "Common Ground." It has to be said that even when he verges on autopilot (it's an impressive sound — lush yet still not the full Murray).

"Like his to lack you in the face before you have a story on your instrument," Murray once said. So what has he done to get himself a story? His recent *Grateful Dead* tribute album was no solution. *Fo Death Revue* has him bringing a sea piece American jazz band together with Senegalese rappers and musicians, among them master drummer Doucou N'Diaye Rose. In the accompanying notes Murray says he believes the group will be his most significant achievement, a political statement and a way of addressing the problems facing people of African descent throughout music, songs, poetry and rap. The rags come courtesy of leading African HipHoppers Positive Black Soul — one led is written by Amin Boleka. The end result is a dire anomaly. Afro/Cuban/hiphop overlaid with unstable syntax. It's hard to believe Murray really thrives songs with lines like "One World Family" and "Too Many Hungry People" add up to much of a political statement. The music falls between all available stools, with

Jamaaladeen Tacuma's boss failing to mesh with the Senegalese percussion. Who knows if this group will evolve into something more elastic and adventurous? For now it feels very short of its aims.

**WILL MONTGOMERY**

## Ø + Noto

Malmö Makro  
NOTON/STARS MUSIC CD 005 CD

## Noto

NOTON/Ø CD

## Goem

Strad Strm  
NOTON/STARS MUSIC CD 005 CD

Minimal to the max, the German Rastermusik label (Raster means "pulse") combines the burning chrome digital abstractions of Finland's Sähkö label with Touch's love of obscure sound sources. These three new CDs on the label's Noto imprint are barely there as are presented in their CD jewel cases, some in black ink on transparent stickers affixed to the front. The music sounds like it has been made under a high degree of self discipline and patient experimentation—but you won't necessarily need those qualities as a listener/consumer to enjoy the best of what they hold. There's no doubt that these guys are seriously dropping science, but is it relaxation music for the Maj generation, or is more at stake?

Music like this—call it dour, rather than power electronics—is on speaking terms with Morton Feldman and Milton Babbitt, as much as, say, Basic Channel or Puscifer. It's good to hear Panasonic's Mika Vainio, aka Ø, returning to the land of obsessive sound explorations he fostered in us with 1995's *Microalbum* on Sähkö. *Micro Makro*, a shared CD (rather than a collaboration) with German artist Carsten Nicola is cross-crowded by the external sounds of raw information in transit: fax, long-distance signal tones, modems, timecodes.

Beginning with a repeated, angry chord alternating with silence that jolts like a shrilling telephone, this gives way to a passage of extraordinary beauty, in which digital tones resembling a bowed saw loom around each other like huge, melancholy carp in a dark pool, while a muted bass drum adds punctuation, deep charges exploding 1000 metres below. His other piece on the CD noddes with a westerly array of noises, but lacks the focus or the emotional resonance of the first.

His sideman on the CD, Carsten Nicola (Noto), seems to be a name to watch for fans of The Plugs: That Cannot Be Listened To While Driving—in it Bernhard Gurrer, Thomas Kross, Anthony Manning, and others. His two contributions to *Micro Makro* apply any shonors over 12 minutes each to single noises, while the 72 tracks that make up the

single piece on *Ø* (divided up into several discrete "movements") act as an aural "how-to" manual for a primitive MIDI studio. As such, it represents a form of virtuosity with the instruments and effects that puts the claims of some electronic musicians that digital music is "limited" into perspective. Inevitably, there are some R2D2isms—perhaps intended, maybe an emulation of bridging—but isn't it just as ridiculous for Oliver Messiaen to mistake birdsong with a piano?

Goem is a mask for Dutchman Frans De Waard, of experimental outfits Kapotte Musik and Bequeer, also known for being chairman of the board at Amsterdam's relentlessly unconventional Staalplaat label. The noises on *Strad Strm* all come out of the Student Simulator, a control device invented to work students' mental reflexes and responses into a more reactive state. Play it in a crowded room and it'll do the same for your near neighbours: the 12 tracks seem designed to tweak the hearing beyond its usual limits by shock tactics rather than gentle persuasion. Like Royal Red's *in-CD*, is frequency waveforms offered in straight lines, the listening experience is stripped to a series of on-off synaptic responses, while the notion of Ambient is subverted to include sound that has a far stronger degree of control over behaviour in public spaces than the benign inducements of mall muzak.

**BOB YOUNG**

## The Orchestre Murphy

Smrit  
ALCOHOL ALBUM CD

## L Voag

The Way Out  
ALCOHOL ALBUM CD

If Samuel Beckett had had his own bar band, might they have sounded like The Orchestre Murphy? Murphy was the title of one of the Nobel prize-winning curmudgeons' funniest short stories. The Murphy on the album, a South London group with a pedigree of fine recordings over the last ten years, share a Beckett-like galows humour and melancholy. "When the screw turns, and the horns load, will you pass out in a state of shock? Maybe, maybe not." In addition, Ireland is tenderly mocked by pieces called "Cathrineven" and "The Bantay Dancer".

The Murphys have toured several times with Psychobilly guitarist Eugene Chadbourne, and singer/guitarist Rob Murphy's avant garde connections are impeccable—so he recently drove UK Mo'n's Dead Ambient bar around the UK. The guitar, bass and drums line up is fleshed out with a sleepy accordion, and colourful banjo, sax and trumpet drop in when required. As with Tom Waits, a musical apocryphedness is clearly audible, even when the songs drop on well-worn popular forms like disco or the French chanson. Behind the idiosyncratic lyricism and the one-take recording style lies carefully crafted

songwriting. No slickness, but a fragile charm, always on the verge of falling apart. "When we danced to Bertolt Brecht, I felt something disconnect."

The whole album is a lament. Apart from the occasional bang line, the music doesn't sound like Tom Waits at all, but they have a similar appeal. Long-term fans will be pleased that Smut maintains the high standard of the earlier *Frankenrock* and *Bogtramping* (both on the Swiss label Out of Depression). "Just Say", "Monique" and the rickrolling opener "Bad Day At Bubbling Brook" are among the best things this unique and woefully underrated outfit have produced.

The other album on Ed Bader's new Alcohol label is a resuscitation of a cult classic from 1979: *The Way Out* by the mysterious L Voag. Mr Voag was Arnos from Arnos & Sank, a member of the punk rock group The Homosexuals, and had connections with The Heat and The Work. The Way Out is seriously weird post-punk to L's weakness, and releasing it 18 years later on CD feels like a deliberate challenge to the throwaway aesthetic of the time. Full marks for playful brinkmanship, experimentation, as Voag mixes with dub and musique concrète, and disposes his voice like Peter Sellers. The resusc features 11 bonus tracks of L Voag outtakes, demos, and the 1979 *How EP*. In a way these tracks stand up best, a little less anonymous musically, more stripped down and direct, especially when a solo Voag thrashes his way through the tongue in cheek angst of "Clucking Freud".

**CLIVE BELL**

## Archie Shepp

Four For Trane  
PULSE/IMP 2182 CD

In order to draw attention to Archie Shepp's 1964 major label debut, John Coltrane posted with him on the cover wearing a rumpled blue jacket. Shepp wore a collared shirt with ragged sleeves (evocation of Coltrane) and sucked on a rebel intellectual's pipe. Although Coltrane didn't play, he contributed four compositions ("Syed's Rite Song", "Nanna" and "Guslin Mary" (from *Giant Steps*) and "Mr Sym" (from *Plays The Blues*)).

Saxophonists close to Coltrane didn't fall into the trap of imitating Shepp's incredible sax—a throaty, plaintive solo that groans its way into existence—so it's a slipstream of harmonic interrogation, but expression willing from cracks in the floor. Drummer was Charles McFate, whose previous gag had been with Ornette Coleman. Shepp was evidently influenced by the joyful arbitrariness and unarmoured melody of Ornette's (also—but he retains the gutbucket honks and erotic sensuality of the tenor sax lineage. Reggie Workman's bass is round, resolute and funky, recorded by Rudy Van Gelder with surprising depth and resonance. Trombonist Roswell Rudd, albeit John Tchicai and trumpeter Alvin Shorter are all aboard, and the arrangements

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Iannis Xenakis

Kraenberg  
ASPHODELOS/EMT 0975 CD

Seethe, surge and shudder, scurry, shimmer and slither: the sounds we hear during *Kraenberg* might be described by one or other, or all of these verbs, even though, of course, music does none of these things. The words suggest the protean nature of Xenakis's music, which jettisons cherished Western notions of formal development and returns us to a time when music is not separable from noise, the pure sonic gesture. Listening to it creates an odd sense of timelessness, as if we might re-imagine these 75 minutes of musical event as one single moment of generative energy.

But we can never return to music's elemental, association-free state. Our musical memory is too capacious. A trombone, for instance, is an instrument with a history, and while few people have ever written for trombone the way Xenakis does, the sound still reaches us rich with associations: at times here, the two trombones recall the statue come to drag Mozart's Don Giovanni into the inferno, at others they sound like nothing so much as the zany antics of

George Chisholm, whose talking warbome enlivened the "light entertainment" of my childhood. And those associations enrich, rather than impoverish my listening.

*Kraenberg* was composed in 1968. It's a big piece for small orchestra: no percussion, but a dozen strings and 11 wood instruments, plus, crucially, a taped portion which at times all but engulfs the live instruments, at other times seems to merge with them, or even be the sound source from which they grow. Although the sleeve insert (by DJ Spooky, who also worked the tape during this live performance by The ST-X Ensemble under conductor Charles Zacharie Bernstein) is more infuriating than informative, it does quote Xenakis, who suggests that the "biological turmoil" and social transformation wrought by imminent population explosion provided a "meeting perspective which underlaid the composition of *Kraenberg*."

Whether knowing that helps us to appreciate the piece is a moot point, but it does show that music concerned for global ecology doesn't have to be vacant philosophizing or brute sloganeering. It can, like *Kraenberg*, be both subtle and tumultuously visceral.

NICK KIMBERLEY



PHOTO: CAROLINE FORBES

are fantastic — Blington-lush, yet streaking with knife-edge tensions.

Four for Trane: a one of the great records of all time, gestural transgression and reconfigured tradition in inimitable dialogue. Never before had revolutionary intent sounded so physical and yet so tender. Epochal.

BEN WATSON

Silverstone

Nagni Micchi  
SOLUP DISC/SOLUP 001 CD

Montage

Antitropopologie  
SOLUP DISC/SOLUP 003 CD

Various Artists

Silverstation 2  
SOLUP DISC/SOLUP 005 CD

Filled with the bohemian bulshit of its doped-tense generation, downtempo beat collage — the sense that sees itself as the ultimate in slacker cool — is probably more concerned with control than any other form of pop music in living memory (especially so on these three CDs from Japan's Soup Disk label). At least there was supposed to be a bit of a thrill in Prog rock's wistful and the intrepid precision of punk/funk had a political purpose. Downtempo, on the other hand, seems to avoid excitement, overindulges, electricity, sex and mayhem at all costs. Indeed, the musicians are content to wallow in their disengagement, calculation and restraint. That

said, why does this stuff seem to have so much less to say than Basic Channel or Thomas Köner who work along pretty much lines?

The treacly timbres on Silverstation's *Nagni Micchi* offer some clues. Basically composed of top piano lines from *The Exorcist* or "London Bridges" and one-note string riffs over the top of rigid beats, *Nagni Micchi* is so lightweight that it would be tossed aside with a single flick from DJ Premier's musical wrist. Windham Hill had better watch out: the George Winston of the 90s lounge class has arrived.

Where Silverstone attempt to pacify through a cool Zen simplicity, Montage try to camouflage over-conceptualisation. They talk a good game: the packaging goes on about "documentary collage from metaphysical life facts", the long titles range from "Phonographic Descent" to "Dig Up The Micology", and, guess what, they've read *Phenomenology* ("Interzone Of The Collage City").

What that means, of course, is lacerated beats underneath some very tired jazz ("A Night In Tunes") and HipHop ("Microphone Fand") samples, over-processed Middle Eastern horn sounds, and a general bloodless pallor. Music is sapped of everything but the most parched drum beats and dust beats based sound on Silverstation 2, a compilation of Soup artists and licensed compans such as DJ Vadim. Unsurprisingly, with Vadim in the area, prog motifs are in full effect. Silverstation is all about attenuation and depletion, making it the most interesting token of the three. However, I want the stuff to be murkier than 1913's long water, but it's as limpid as one of Kitaro's crystals. What kind of crap do these guys smoke?

PETER SHAPPO

Tarwater

11/6 12/10  
KITTY+INTERNATIONAL 70702 CD

Macromassaa

Puerta Hellogabal  
SONAROCK 21109 CD

Two unrippable Euro post-rock outings, that dedicate their surreal poetry to Rome.

Tarwater are an offshoot of Berlin based To Rococo Rot, formed by Ronald Lippock and Benji Jenzum (the engineer on To Rococo's *Vocelli*). However, although elements of TRR's minimalist typocratic pulse come to the fore from time to time (like on "Bonal" and "Inversad"), the Tarwater sound drifts across darker territories leaning more towards Tortoise. English and languid indie ballads with roots stretching back to Lou Reed. The music is fairly hard to pin down: the opening tracks have a warm, sultry, instrumental sound reminiscent of Talk Talk — heavy on bass, drums and piano. "Han Er Der Inner" has the jazz club with sax, symbols and virophone. But as the album winds its way onwards, it gets tighter and trippier — "Rise, morning is red, no wonder-sun in Rome, Sir", they chant in a dry, Tricky-ish manner.

The lyrics feel like random associations — reconstructing Europe as unknown, urban dream territory. However the eclecticism of the attitude isn't backed by much of a palpable presence, especially when compared with street artists on the fringes of rock, pop and dream. I mentioned Talk Talk and Tricky, but this is much smaller in scale and lacking in

muscularity, relying more on a throwaway vagueness. "I never fall apart because I never fall together", they draw offhandedly on "Eurosult", and "I won in a Roman way" becomes an anthem.

Macromassaa have all the vinegar that Tarwater lacks, if a little lugubrious at times. Puerta Hellogabal struts to ensue a dark, Bataille-like poetry, like some unholy tribute to the perversions of Hellogabalus, high priest of Basil, third century Roman Emperor, and self-made solar god. Victor Nubia and Juan Ciek have mastered a group that can wield clarinet, flute, sax, guitar and assorted horns over pounding drum beats, as well as twirling a way of seeing their Spanish lyrics like wonderful bulls. Tracks such as "La Estrella De Espana, De Nubes Y Fiebre" conjure a dark, sludgy resort fug, thick with malotruated brass. The feel of storm clouds gathering brings with it the possibility of squalling guitars and horns. Sax, horns and bubbling synth on "Puerta" create a heavy chthonic groove, a braiser version of Miles Davis's hallucinatory brookings of the 70s. "Cubo-Alimbar" discharges a furious free jazz jam on cello, drums and organ, while the title track rounds up the flutes, sax, clarinet, cello and guitar in splendid disarray, an elegy to Hellogabalus in mourning. The constant return to song format keeps this more like a hot-breathed Vaughn rock than Last Exit or God, but some non lyrical tracks open up proceedings — "The dissociative loops of brass on 'Espino Es Su Luz', like some archaic, Vance Jones, or the baring dissonant harmonies on "Dormitorio".

PAUL FRYTHE

## Tosca

Opera  
6-STATE 6-STATE 002 CD

## Fila Brazilia

Luci Be A Weirdo Tonight  
POK RECORDS POKR 045 CD

## Baby Mammoth

One Two Freak  
POK RECORDS POKR 044 CD

The whole notion of chill out seems to be a refusal of the possibility that meaning or intention resides in music — a way for the artists to deny any responsibility or avoid making any effort. Of course it's symptomatic of the times, but that doesn't make it any more compelling. Two of these discs represent possible escape routes, while the last extenuates the inevitable, total numbness that chilling generates.

Tosca, a collaboration between Vienna's Richard Dornmayer and Rupert Huber, pretty much follows the standard downtempo path of abstract horizon — lazy beats, filtered samples and non sequiturs. However, their between-the-beats spaces are more effective than the usually arid chambers of Tripfunk's quasi-dub layout. Their meanderings through the urban underbelly are anchored with more live than live bass samples than those of their contemporaries, lending at least an illusion of substance to the record. Opero releases on Gavin Bryner's *Jesus' Blood Never Felt Me Yet* territory: looped found sounds, various pop/pastorals conjure up clichés of social realism (ratty streets, sidewalk hustlers, people alone in a crowd, ethnic ghettos, gummy faces, travelers going nowhere, bumbling voices) rather than so-called pseudo surrealism.

Instead of getting over on its smarts, *Luci Be A Weirdo Tonight* transcends its genre and its title through its musicology. Steve Cobby, the man behind *Fila Brazilia* and the one who provides the bulk of the music from the POK sty, seems destined to release more albums than Johnny Cash by the time he's 35. Typically for someone with too many ideas, *Luci Be A Weirdo Tonight* is a distillation of disco tunes, lounge jazz touchstones, Balinese swami and Bono-style agitatedness. There's even some space rock drumming (guaranteed to piss off the purists) on "Van Allen Belt," while "Big Goat Groupies" is a collusion between Prog excess and disintegration stomp. There are times when the record tries too hard to be pretty, but Cobby's attempt to wed his art to his head is laudable indeed.

Unlike the very good *Bridging Two Worlds* from earlier this year, Baby Mammoth's *One Two Freak* is as staid and static a record as you'll never hear to hear. Most POK records tend to disregard the external world, but their extreme isolation paradoxically puts you inside *One Two Freak*: however, sits around like Hilary's Everest. It's just there. Bears come into view, state their indifference and scurry underneath the profane, with

foundations without building any sort of momentum. The spoken word sample on "For Dear Life" gives the game away: this is an album that posits a cocooned desertization as bliss. However, being dead to your surroundings usually means being dead to your audience.

PETER SHAPIRO

## Various

Southern Journey Volume 3: 61  
Highway Mississippi  
ROUNDER CD7703 CD

## Various

Southern Journey Volume 4  
Brethren, We Meet Again  
ROUNDER CD7704 CD

## Various

Southern Journey Volume 6  
Sheep, Sheep Don'tcha Know The Road  
ROUNDER CD7706 CD

Part of an enormous reissue programme — 13 volumes in this series alone and in excess of a hundred from around the world — these field recordings are a remarkable testament to ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax. More importantly, they contain lots of great music. The *Southern Journey* series was recorded in the American South of 1939, documenting sacred and secular, instrumental and vocal traditions which were still very much alive there but either forgotten or co-opted into the music industry elsewhere (Volumes 1, 2, and 5 are devoted to folk and old time music, whereas these focus on blues and spirituals). Volume 3, which comes closest to recovered notions of a blues recording, is a fine introduction. Six of the 24 cuts feature Fred McDowell, a classic Delta blues figure in the style of Blind Willie Johnson. He is superb performances, beautifully recorded. Even more valuable are the recordings of less familiar traditions: a fife and drum piece based on antiquated blues forms, themselves derived from African rhythms, field hollers recorded at the notorious Parchman Farm penitentiary, spirituals, work songs and dance music.

Volume 4 documents white spirituals, which may have less of a cachet among music aficionados today but are perhaps even more remarkable in an effort to overcome the difficulties of popularizing spirituals among often illiterate congregations. Southern Protestants evolved two distinct traditions, lining hymns and Sacred Harp. In the former a leader feeds the lyric and melody line by line to the congregation, who reply in protracted leavings with variable emphasis and embellishment. Sacred Harp, by contrast, involves congregations using hymnals which separate noted lines for bass, tenor, and soprano voices, using "shape note" notation. This complex method produces impassioned performances of a powerful, ethereal beauty

Other spiritual and gospel traditions are featured, including some truly affecting individual testimonies recorded at religious congregations.

Volume 6, examining expressions of the sacred and the sinful, features Willie Jones's "You Got Dimples In Your Jaw", of which Lomax recalls: "On one memorable night in a gambling dive, surrounded by gun toters and hard-headed women, I recorded the hectic and city-entranced blues style of the deep South of today." At around the same time John Lee Hooker would record and popularize the same blues as "Dimples." Some 30 years before Fred McDowell committed his version of "Keep Your Lamp Trimmed And Burning" to tape for Lomax, Blind Willie Johnson had recorded his. But the performances for Lomax are superb, beautifully recorded and evidently heartfelt, richly contextualized here as treasures of an American culture not yet in thrall to mass mediation. Collectively, they show your copy of *The Complete Robert Johnson* to be about as definitive a document of American roots culture as a single piece of a jigsaw puzzle.

THI OMEN

## Various Artists

Spunk Jazz  
BLUJAZZ001 CD+LP

In the Mark Twain novels, Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn, on the run from parents and authorities, are reduced to drinking "sunk water" from an old fire truck. This leek (causing not a few youthful classroom titers) was unevaporated, stagnant rainwater. Do you smell a metaphor yet? This compilation reveals a marginal backwater of experimental breakbeat funk that's been growing, like a jungle creek whose ecology has been running not undisturbed by human or beast, in towns like Brighton, Cambridge and Coventry.

Some of this stuff is more of a blunt instrument than a cutting edge. *Spunk Jazz* sounds the claxon call to a bedroom-bound nation: "What you're doing, it's all perfectly natural and healthy, guys — go with the flow." This music runs like the clappers, bowling along like a runaway train about to go off the rails — check "Fat Dog (I 2 O'Clock)" by Come On, Feel The Nothing, or Value Area's "Old School Knee Clicker," a perfect soundtrack for a speed up film of human behaviour: jerks, twitches, incurable PCs and all. "FYA" by Animals On Wheels (aka Andy Coleman, recently picked up from Brighton's Bovril label by Ninja Tune) is a playground scrap in which a miserable in-hat sample, a furiously pedalling Rhodes piano and wail with guitar all end up with scuffed knees as a voice shouts "Workin'". Vert's "Tense And Learning" sounds like a drill 'n' bass remix of a 1973 Weather Report gig. Titles such as "Diny Great Mable" (by Bulbski's Turn) and "The Ballad Of Terry Ping" (by Miley Boy) point to British eccentric

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## soundcheck

humor in the mold of Monty Python and The Bonzo Dog Doh Dah Band. There's even an 'artist' called Piddington Breaks — his "Spore Parts" riffs on the kind of building site noises that will likely have public-minded citizens on the phone to the council. This is the devil's own therapy.

**ROB YOUNG**

### Various Artists

Unknowns Deutschland — The Krautrock Archive Volume 2  
VRGN CDV02 472 CD

### Various Artists

Unknowns Deutschland — The Krautrock Archive Volume 3  
VRGN CDV02 473 CD

The controversy that surrounded the release of Volume 1 of this series (ie whether the artists featured were genuine German space rockers from the period or merely John Cage-inspired '90s wannabes) will undoubtedly rage on now that these final pieces of the mysterious Pyramid label's puzzle have been located and slotted together. Although the sleeve notes to both these excellent samplers give only the simplest information regarding the origins of the featured groups, simply listening will confirm beyond doubt that this is the real stuff and not some wild ambitious prank.

If further proof were needed, untold the booklet inside Volume 3 and gave in awe at the tiny cover reproduction of The Nagazul's one and only album. A faceless, cloaked day figure stands against a backdrop of abstract shadows; the group's name crudely spelled out in slivers of white paper. The end result is too primitive and representative of The Nagazul's unearthly Prog drone sound to be false. "The Dead Marshes" on Volume 2 and "The Tower Of Babel-Dur" on Volume 3 are unlike any other German rock music you'll ever hear. Both elongated tracks drift out of the speakers like some kind of alien gas, slowly entrancing the senses to leave the listener breathless and slightly dazed. Being dark hippies, The Nagazul decided to call themselves after their favourite characters from Tolkien's Lord Of The Rings. They'd have done better to name themselves after something from pulp horror/sci-fi fiction writer Clark Ashton Smith's collected works, a creator of lost worlds who would have immediately recognised the dead star where the lot were coming from.

Elsewhere there are fine frolicasting guitar and analogue synth workouts from Golem, Cosmic Corridors, Temple (all of whom were featured on Volume 1), Sorulina, Ten To Zen, Chronos and Soal, together with Neil Anderson's "Flourish" which erupts into a cascading shower of overlapping, treated instrumentation, including a drunkenly manipulated sawtooth. As even a cursory aural inspection of these collections reveals,

the Pyramid label was home to a veritable army of free spirits.

**EDWIN POUNCEY**

### Vienna Art Orchestra

Tango From Obongo

DELMATRIPE ER 10-2 3CD

Tango From Obongo, a limited edition set, showcases previously available recordings with some emphasis on the packaging. Instead of a crassie, preel-case you get a sturdy cardboard box holding Tango From Obongo (1979), a slip-case containing Two Songs For Another Year (1988) plus "Jazzes No" and "Kontakapuri" from 1977, and a sampler featuring 13 Delmatripe artists in an ingenious cantilevered cover. All this and good music, too.

By the 70s the notion of the big band may have died from sundry causes (and if you really wanted a big sound why not call up a few more effects on your synth?) but orchestral jazz was in rude health. Projects like Globe Unity, Cadencia Nova Danica, Mike Westbrook's Concert Band, The Brotherhood Of Breeds, The Willem Breuker Kollektief, The LIGO, The JCGA, Mike Gibbs' groups, the New American Orchestra, Pierre Dorge's New Jazz Orchestra and George Gruntz's Concert Jazz Band illustrate the vapour and variety available to imaginative composers and arrangers.

Mathias Rugeig's Vienna Art Orchestra just set of grow. Rugeig, engaged as a solo pianist at a nightclub, kept inviting additional musicians to join him. Eventually he dropped out as a performer, leaving the keyboard to Uli Scherer, though there's a brief example of Rugeig's playing on the Obongo disc. In an interview with Francis Davis during The VAO's 1985 American tour Rugeig explained that The VAO's "style and philosophy of composition" derives from European music, but "it's just in that the writing is a vehicle to encourage individual expression".

Rugeig has often been criticised for adopting jazz as his primary task. These days unusual juxtapositions are the norm (only musicians and radio stations worry about rigid categorisation) but Tango from Obongo was some truth in the accusation: at the start the rising music is Gelsamuffa, and "The World Of BeBano and BIGBO" pivots on a mélange of cut-ups from Blington, Garner, Monk, Gillespie et al. The patches in Songs are less obvious, and the music is less orchestral, but it verities Rugeig's claims about empowering the soloists. His use of the full group is sparing; much of the time he focuses on part of the Art, but the ensemble's apposite interventions prod and incite effectively. The first song demonstrates Rugeig's economical but telling way with texture, achieving richness without lushness. Both discs contain a wealth of well shaped but intense playing from reedmen Harry Pepl and Wolfgang Puchner.

**BARRY WITHERSON**

### John Wall

Fractur

UTTERPSHAF 3 CD

John Wall invites comparison with David Shea as a composer who works by sampling direct from other musical sources. However, whereas Shea makes a point of dramatising the cultural associations of his samples into collaged cinematic narratives, Wall takes a completely opposite turn, using digital technology to homogenise sonic textures from many sources into a coherent, aesthetic.

The four pieces on Wall's third CD Fractur include (usually unrecognisable) quotes from 19 in one: Evan Parker, John Zorn, Dave Holland, Swans, Ryoji Ikeda, David Toop, and in the other, Cage, Henze, Penderecki, Britowski, Lutoslawski, Weinberg, Stockhausen, Xenakis and Nono. Though this may sound like a showdown between the forces of avant improv and modernist composition, Wall is primarily interested in dismantling and reconfiguring the shared tonal materials and intensities of both to extract an overarching shadow embracing purity and noise. In fact, given that a piece by any of the above is technically rich enough to have provided all of the sounds for the pieces here, the use of the fragments seems almost like a ritual digging of the blood of the sound gods to empower Wall's modernist superhead.

As you'd expect from the materials the resulting pieces are highly intense, angular, and contrastive. However there's also a meditative dimension to Wall's approach. It's as if, through listening to the spiky ethereality and percussive depictions of semiotic, post-serialist and Cagean music, he's imbued its sonic textures without its methods, and reproduced the sounds as part of an intuitive emotional project — halfway between composition and improv.

The 20 minute Fractur recalls Stockhausen and Boulez in its opening, piano parts, aiming at impossible points of presence, fused with drones, finger clicks and Evan Parker's guttural sine harmonics. The pieces are full of percussive patterns foisted by nebulous microtonal gestures (from Penderecki or Xenakis?). The wicker strings, pipes of electronic noise, abrasive clicks and steps of sound are the equivalent of the abstract artists' flicks and dips.

The drive towards an unmediated purity of sound events — free from the middle tones and logic of subjective lyricism — taps into an austere vein of modernist subtlety (not so incongruously, the minimalist CD packaging recalls that of Jay Dawson's Soft). Wall's chosen sounds are all high shimmering harmonics and growling, abrupt bass — throughout all the pieces he has made extensive use of improvised responses to the work in progress by Peter Shappard (vocal) and John Edwards (double bass).

"Stars" recalls the ghost of Weinberg in its exploration of string textures — heavily scored g/y, high fretted drones, sudden plucks and harmonics transmute into an aural string

quartet before breaking up into a soft rain of tiny sound fragments. "Orbit" again pats scurrying whistling violin against a more rhythmic clapping bass, while "Untitled 3" pats the bass and violin against shell-like trilling, long droning scrapes and Cagean silence.

**NATT FYFTEEN**

### Wa Man And Ensemble

Chinese Traditional And Contemporary Music  
NMBUS 464877 CD

### Fong Nam

Jolayan, Muzo From New Siam  
NMBUS 464883 CD

Wu Man has recorded with Bill Lawwell and The Kronos Quartet among others. She plays a pipa, or plucked lute, and is here accompanied by a chamber group who play zheng (plucked zither), erhu and gushu (bowed lute), and da su (fluted and suona (shoan)). As the instrumentation suggests, the ensemble has a keen respect for the Chinese 'yuk and bamboo', or shu shu of traditional heterophony. As with other traditional musics, an adoption by academia has paralleled a fall from popular grace, and it's down to ensembles such as this to maintain a love for the beauty of traditional forms alongside an awareness of modern innovations. This disc features traditional pieces, such as "Xiao Pu'an Zhai", which is heard here in a solo version for pipa from a score dating back to 1818, as well as three recent compositions, notably "C-A-G-A-4", a dedication to John Cage by Tan Dun (composer of the soundtrack to the Hong Kong handover, and of Ghost Opera, which Wu Man recently recorded with The Kronos Quartet). This is a more accessible collection than her earlier Nimbus disc.

The pitch (percussion) ensemble Fong Nam's Sleeping Angel is a fine introduction to The classical music. Seven fine The musicians are led by Boonying Kaekong, a master of the reed, or The xylophone, but attention tends to focus on eighth member Brian Gaozi, a Californian Buddhist whose "Chao Praya Concerto", featured here, elicited a caty response from a radio audience at the 1995 Prun. This resident Gaozi has long been a devotee of This music, and he has generally blended into the ensemble playing a song cycle. His concerto, however, illustrates the ensemble's intention to "create a bridge between the dim past and the present", incorporating Western classical idioms to push the bounds of traditional music. It isn't the most remarkable achievement in New Music, being too tolerant of the conservators, but it succeeds on its own terms and is only one element in the repertoire of this remarkable ensemble. The closing "Fong Nam" is rather more radical, updating a traditional piece with the looser, jazzier elements of Gaozi's piano Fong Nam should be applauded for their devotion to a living tradition.

**TIM OWEN**



# in brief electronica

Reviewed by Rob Young

## Aedene Cycle *Albino* BEANSERVICE

BECD011 CD  
Three years ago, Aedene Cycle were part of that interesting first wave of Norwegian Ambient — alongside Biosphere and Skech — to be picked up by the fast-conscious Belgian R&S label. Now, key member Gaute Barlandhaug is back solo on a homegrown imprint, but the time away has been used well. "Orange Basil" is a pretty amiable through Ambient fields of swing, but most of the rest is broader. "Blank" contains desiccated, muffled tribal talking drums. "Pleasure" is lifted from the muck by ketene, high register organ and, again, those double-time dotoms from the next valley but one. Sounds like laboratory's permanent host in the muck.

## Beafield *Beafield* COMPACT

RECORDS 011 CD  
Composer Hiroshi Michael Reinboth finally drops a full-length record by his own Beafield outfit. His take on heavy analogue synth funk yields a fertile root crop. The Moog bassline of "Planetary Deadlock" turns under breathy female vocals like tubers tangling under the soil, while the phantom note-clusters that run through tracks such as "Did You Know [The Truth]" and the Junglist "Code Of Confidence" sounds like the trophies of a quest for a magical sonic elixir. Elsewhere, double basses, Pharoah Sanders-style jingling percussion and overdriven cello keep the mood loose and spontaneous.

## Exhavior *Coaxial* LINEA ALTERNATIVA

LA 4 CD  
MSB Electronics *At Work* etc  
00010011 CD  
Two deep electronic depth soundings with Spanish connections. Exhavior has cropped up in these pages before as Orles Gagoni — the work of Miguel Ruiz. Coaxial is echo-

chamber trance, reminiscent of the Fax label's flair — and more rhythmic — moments. Nice work if you can find it.  
MSB finds Spanish Dark Ambienter Saverio Evangelista moonlighting from his day job as a member of Explendor Geométrico, in this collaboration with Roman producer Maurizio Martenico. Difficult to be sure, but there's an apparent lack of calculation throughout that makes me think it's improvised from their personal libraries of sounds. "awakening@monte arvensae" is a "Sam Kerner" for unimportant soloists, with some beautiful Moog playing and a stereo-enhanced bass rap. A project that gains much from isolationist circumstances.

## Higher Intelligence Agency & Pete Namlook *SEADO* HAXWE

HA CD3  
Ladies and gentlemen, we are floating in space. Bobby Bird — Birmingham's Higher Intelligence Agency — docks with Captain Namlook's motherhood and together they blast off hunting for signs of alien life. Now that Fax releases are fewer and further between than before, Namlook's expressive view of Ambient (there is full effect on the weightless drone of "Secret Location" and the long, suspended animation intro to "Skydive") is sounding better and better. HIA's rhythmic nervous system doesn't harm matters either. "Intruder Detector" has a Studio One (Perry Vincent) love driving it, while "Skydive's" development section features a rocket-assisted Saharan rhythm.

## Pacoa *Symbolic Language* RESON

RS009 CD  
Heavy duty 4/4 electronics from Berlin. On this aftereffect from the explosion of interest in the Cham Reaction label, the enigmatic Pacoa dives deep into the pulsing soul of German

Techno. Most of his grooves, in fact, pack a firmer punch than, say, the recent Vanguer release. His trick is to rely set the drums yammering hard. "After Woods" is amazing, more than four and a half minutes of a strange rattling sound resembling someone hauling up a particularly rusty anchor.

## Q-Moog *The Arc Of Bluesness* SARCASMOE SUB001 CD

There's an intensity about Q-Moog's debut. "For me, this album is the forever search for true meaning of what it is to be a human being," the man known only as Green writes on the cover. One thing's clear: this was not recorded on expensive equipment, which makes it unusual for an album coming out of Detroit (apparently Greens, of African and Aboriginal origins, counts Juan Atkins among his mentors). There are fine moments of silicon soul here — "All My Love" skates across a thin ice of percussion on the edge of cracking, "Mirabella" kicks off with an Ike Hayes soulfuler twinkling safety words too close to the mic, vocals on the promiscuously titled "Egyptian Night Flight" are taken by a backwards dissonant of Fauré. Recommended for its peculiar production values alone — the whole thing sounds like it's coming out of a battered radio, or belching from a car stereo half a mile away.

## Björn Svin *Mer Strøm* AKAL

RECORDS 000101 CD  
Arj Snook *Fruit Of The Loop* LUGOPIR 2002 CD

Two young European guys offering quirky spins through their private virtual worlds. 21 year old Dane Björn Svin's CD is all angular edges and hi-energy beats. "No Space", with its drawled post-alcoholic vocal, is reminiscent of the New York robot-house paragon on Khan's "Bad Computer Bad", the rest, especially "Fruit The Maniacs", is just the right side of banger.

An (pronounced "An-Jay") Snook is a precocious 16 year old with a penchant for dismantling the shabbiness of disco clichés. There is a growing taste for this kind of jolly slowed down House approach I find hard to share, unless it's in the hands of masters like

France's Motorbass or the Swins outfit Bel Air. That said, there's an obvious spirit of experimentation in the young Snook — at several points he throws the soundtrack open to include the sound of the sweat from his bedroom — that might lead to a more rounded music in the fullness of time.

## Starfish Pool *Dante's Carnival* SUBSTASIA SUB001 CD

Tom Vedvik *Sutra* Spm  
CIBROCCATO C000 AMSET CD  
Lazest from Belgian outfit Starfish Pool, and boy, does it feel free! A few years ago, they were producing one of the better strands of Euro-Ambience on Nova Zembla, but on the pretentiously titled *Dante's Carnival* they're reduced to plugging lumpen France Techno, and even — on "Dante's Carnival Act II" — an utterly nondescript ragga beat. The hour or so spent in their company is pretty dismal. Tom Vedvik is an techno Ambient soundscape artist hailing from Hermosa Beach, California. One day, it will be possible to program CD players to flash warning lights when a disk of this description is inserted, for it's more than likely you're going to find a lot of white-robed leopold d'neal. Actually, Sutra Spm isn't quite as bad as the worst West Coast exponents — "Screen Gate" is an OK piece of Ambient dub — but it still can't escape the general feeling of dilution — 'real' tabla and star notwithstanding.

## Paul W Teebrooke

Connections on-art opus CD  
As his alter-ego Stass, Steve Pricton has played a central role in the area of British Techno that centred around The Black Dog, Mark Broom, and labels like Mo'Wax, B12, Peccoff and Likemind. Perseveringly monitored for this excellent solo venture on Kirk Degroot's Op-Art label, Connections is his best so far. Pricton has a gorgeous way with keyboard writing, and his floating, lingering chord shapes shimmer behind his remarkably inventive rhythms, constructed from sampled jazz drummers and intense machining. A genuinely individual and strong voice in a field where 'abstraction' is often a substitute word for lack of substance. □

John Wall

FRACTUR

# in brief new jazz

Reviewed by Andy Hamilton

## Hardark Jazz Orchestra

**Pearl And Elegance** (GO JAR 028 CD) Its name gets it to the point of the column, though for once the motronic question "But is it jazz?" has some point. Mark Harvey has running his Boston-based orchestra off and on for over 20 years, and this live CD is their second on Leo. There's not a lot of jazz groove in the 76 minutes of mostly encores, tributes and elegies, and the orchestration owes as much to Charles Ives as Ellington and Gil Evans. The singing's a bit "classical" too. "Don Cherry's Book Of Beauty" eventually gets into a Latin feel, but "Other Angels/Other Voices" stays resolutely in chorale mode. Solists tend not to be too memorable — or well-known — but it's a brave and unusual venture.

## Loi Coxhill/George Haslam

**Solos East West** (SAC 338 CD) From Knoxley, UK, to East Stratford, London — solo sax from Haslam on tour and Coxhill at home. Haslam's warm, breathy baritone is heard on a mix of standards and originals — Leonard Bernstein's "Somewhere" must be a favourite, it was also on the recent *Meltdown-Haslam* duo album (also on SLAP). Haslam's relaxed approach leads to a passionate intensity on Ellington's "I Don't Mean A Thing", and the nasal sound of tangerine — a Hungarian folk instrument that's a cross between oboe and clarinet — is telling on his own "Speakeasy". Coxhill is his quirky self and very much lo-fi on the 23-minute "Incongruous" — a private live recording, possibly from that eminent sound engineer Sony Walkman.

## Marty Ehrlich/Cren Goldberg

**Light At The Crossroads** (SOLARIS SAC 151 CD) Ubiquitous clarinet and sax player Marty Ehrlich — here restoring himself to clarinet and bass clarinet — teams with Ben Goldberg on the same instruments. In a mostly bebopish set of originals by the two players, the possibilities of tonal contrast are explored with wit and imagination. Trevor Dunn on bass and Kenny Wollesen on drums are equal voices in the argument. The snuics? I Don't Know The World Without Don Cherry? is one of several recent Cherry tributes, while "Dark Sesame" sounds beautifully into a minor blues. One of Ehrlich's best recent efforts.

## Four 80 East The Albums

acorn 001 CD The publicity lists this as jazz-funk and

comes with recommendations for RMI apparel, but it's several steps on from 70s fusion. Four 80 East, from Toronto, features Rob Delbec on bass and programming and Tony Grace on drums, with an additional guitar and trumpet, and sax solo from Jon Stewart. They've mixed fusion with the trance-like repetitions of Ambient Techno, and the result shouldn't be mistaken for retro jazz grooves as top quality aural wallpaper. There's a sophisticated layering of textures and some inspired transitions, for instance to the haunting melodic coda on "Buzz". This music often transcends its aspirations.

## Kankawa B-III

**ivc solo 2** Jazz musicians have been trying to approximate Jimi Hendrix since Miles Davis was obliged to record with him (see the Alan Douglas review). The *Wive 1611* Hendrix may not have known what a diminished chord was, but he played them using Miles's autobiography, and contrast the usual defensive hostility of rock musicians towards "jazz chords". Harmonic complexity and more important, mastery of the blues, make Hendrix's connection with jazz a tantalising issue. Gi Evans arranged Hendrix compositions with some success, and now Japanese Hammond organ maestro Kankawa creates what he calls a "hard rock jazz" setting, in company with ex-Gi Evans players such as trumpeter Lew Soloff and altoist Dave Sanborn. Sadly, much sound and fury and doozy vocals relegate this to the "heretic fusion" category.

## Dwe Ochsberg/Jörg Wölf

**Fischer** (Lo 60 48 030 CD) **Collective 4tet** (Circus Ltd JAR 001 CD) Two reference points for Lo are Paul Wiley and Cecil Taylor — fitting with the trio's aim of playing "pulsating earthy music as well as soar up to spheres of choice fragility", as they say. Uwe Ochsberg is on piano, Jörg Wölf on bass and Jörg Fischer on drums. The trio, based in the Cologne area, was formed in 1994. The word "Lo" seems to have some Swiss significance and all the titles begin with those letters, except "Volvo Inferno" and "Vaid, Intenst II" for solo piano. There's a sense of form, and each piece is an individual creation. "Luz" exploits a remarkable range of percussion sonorities, while "Lostshore" comes across like one of Paul Wiley's dark rumblings, with what sounds like prepared piano. Two solo piano pieces are limpid pastel shadings. Thoughtful and impressive. Once is more in Cecil Taylor's soundworld,

but with episodes of tender respite. *Collective 4tet* are Jeff Hoyer (trombone), Mark Henne (piano), Willem Gessner (percussion) and Herman Parker (bass). Parker is Cecil Taylor's bassist of choice, Gessner, from Zurich, is the only non-American. "Hiss" builds to a towering intensity over its 13 minutes. It's surrounded by more restrained imponderables — "Bliss" is a brief, gentle somnolence/piano duet, "Hiss" is brooding, impressionistic night music. The long title track displays the bassist's mastery of arco technique. A fine representative of William Parker's "post-Trans tradition".

## Sherri Roberts Twilight World

**BROWNSTONE BR 064 CD** Debut album by Roberts, a young singer based in the Bay area, with excellent backing from Mark Soskin (piano), Harvey Swartz (bass) and Jeff Hamilton (drums). She knows how to interpret the carefully considered and often unusual standards in her programme. Her singing is debellable, the best yet, mostly impressively swinging, the rich melody reminds me of Helen Merrill. Gi Evans's favourite vocal, Highlights include "I Remember You", maybe better known in Frank Field's version than Charlie Parker's — here the great lyrics by Johnny Mercer are beautifully rendered. An excellent album and a new talent to look out for.

## AnneMarie Roelofs' Waste

**Watchers Music From The Land Of Milk And Honey** (VTC 041 CD) **Homier/Vagabond/Fait** **Cornie De Vache** (veto 041 CD) Two live recordings from the *Phusque Actuelle Festival*, Victoria. *Cornie De Vache* is a captivating album, featuring Anne Homier (vocals), Yvonne Trudel (piano), Wagnon (bass), and Homier (drums). *Phusque Actuelle Festival*, Victoria. *Cornie De Vache* is a captivating album, featuring Anne Homier (vocals), Yvonne Trudel (piano), Wagnon (bass), and Homier (drums). *Phusque Actuelle Festival*, Victoria. *Cornie De Vache* is a captivating album, featuring Anne Homier (vocals), Yvonne Trudel (piano), Wagnon (bass), and Homier (drums).

convincing. AnneMarie Roelofs' album is not so convincing. An eclectic post-free improv setting of a variety of three pianos who escape from captivity in a rubbish set, pursued by a vicious cat, who after various adventures — you know the kind of thing ("Twist" and "Sally" are words that come to mind. Roelofs plays trombone, trumpet and her trumpet (of course), with Johannes Kraemer on electric guitar and live electronics, and Dick Harwood on sax. With lots of bugle calls, animal noises and chase sequences, I guess it's meant to be amusing.

## Soft/Vu Ragged Jack

**MMR MM 068 CD** A standout feature of this superlative album — led by pianist Jamie Soff and trumpeter Cuong Vu — is the drumming of Jon Black. He gives the light sound of the quarter at the corner edge, doing it without the assistance of bass or bass guitar. Black and Andrew D'Angelo — here on alto sax and bass clarinet — were together in the highly innovative Human Feet. The book step rhythms are a stylistic signature of the downtown New York school, but there's softly impressionistic playing too. Soft and Vu are new to me, but their compositions are open and refreshing, the combinations unusual and challenging. Strongly recommended.

## The South African Exiles

**Thunderbolt** (veto 041 CD) There's not too much on record by the marvellous musicians brought together by South African pianist Chris McGregor. In exile in London, he founded the legendary big band Brotherhood Of Muses in 1970. This excellent live recording from 1985 features a smaller aggregation: the great Johnny Dyall on bass, Dudu Pukwana on alto and Harry Beckett on trumpet, but with Gilbert Matthews on drums instead of Louis Moholo. The recorded sound isn't special, and the full group is featured on only half the tracks, including the poignant Harry Beckett ballad "Chandeliers And Mirrors". But there are excellent solo piano and pianobass duet interpretations of the McGregor compositions "Bakewell" and "You And Me". There's an untitled guitar instrumental, probably Lucky Rankin. Today all the original South African exiles featured on this recording are dead — a terrible indictment of the physical and mental anguish caused by apartheid.

## Windom Tooth Medical Pass

**edwitt FACTORY WOODS 041 141 CD** I thought mental illness was the stuff Stan Laurel pulled (intentionally) from ear to ear to annoy Oliver Hardy. Turns out it's also very scary album by a noise group from Austin, Texas who play primal neo-industrial destructo parmented blues (it says here). Stephen Marsh on electric guitar, Ed Greer on bass and David Liles on drums also use an array of metal objects including gas cans, saw blades and oil drums, plus a human skull. Marsh's occasional weird vocals are distorted through a Green Bullet harmonica microphone, he begins by telling us, "The next solo is a lowdown dirty blues, the sort of thing you rarely hear played at a Girl Scout's camp." But these are distant reminiscences of the blues, the jackhammer beat maybe originates with Muddy Wilson's stop-time hit "Hoochie-Coochie Man". Very dark, noisy and mindblowing — listening right through at full volume could prove fatal. □

**in brief** outer limits

Reviewed by Biba Kopf

**Jack Aral** Dance & Mood Music  
vibes.coffee@att.net

In the 60s, the TV testcard served as the Trojan horse that smuggled odd musical hybrids into suburban front rooms. But for what? did Frenchman Arel secure complete artistic control from his music library paymasters? Answer: the right to engineer plasticque moderne moods to make those Tupperware parties go with a swing. When he did exercise his contracted freedom he managed to produce something other than jazzed R&B. Plunk, like the electronically enchanted "Picture Of Spring"

**Aube** Stated: Glean was left on co  
Aube's Mother Nakema usually punishes the

Sources of his intriguing autopsies of nose more often than not they're skiving body sounds and beaks probed up by medical recording equipment. This time round he offers no clues. His pieces accrete around strings of silence. Crystalline sounds gradually come into earshot, and slowly harden into dense glistening knots of nose capable of repelling anything Nakajima applies to them, be it piercingly high laser pitches or dribbling DNA composites. If Nakajima is not actually dealing in raw nerve this time, he still touches one.

**Band Of Pain** You're Miss Fortune [www.bopain.com](http://www.bopain.com)

**Controlled Bleeding** The Poisoner's score must be 50.33 (3)

Two takes on darkside Ambient. Band Of Rain is Soave Pits plus a little help from family and friends. His music perches itself somewhere between the academy — Stockhausen's *Gesang Der Junglinge* is referenced, Cage's silent offering "433" is assayed — and the factory floor. Veteran soul: Controlled Bleeding have droned through so many different post-industrial permutations, it'd be easy to dismiss them as chancers. That is, if they didn't periodically turn out discs as good as the Poisoner's grimly evocative indictment of the polluters of the world's petrified forests.

**Coil** Unnatural History III 1995-2000  
VOL 16 LOG 12-00

The deeper Coil dig into their archives the weirder the going gets, though the music for commercials section — previously available on the *Halfrazer* themes 10" — is aberrant only insofar as it really did help Coil sell consumer dreams. Elsewhere they scattered their most hallucinatory tracks across a series of hard-to-find limited edition singles.

and compilations "Baby Food", street slang for ketamine, is pulled from a Sub Rosa disc and is an accurate electronic transcription of drug induced jellification as you can get without a prescription. Lowelie and no less inventive is the mapping of subterranean currents that is "Lost Rivers Of London". Cool arcane at its most evocative and exploratory

**Andy Haas** Arnhem Land **ABANT**  
MANICOT

According to Heide's sleeve notes, Amihm Land is what Dutch miners christened Australia in 1623. Himself a resident of New Amsterdam (ie NYC), his remote geographical connection is presumably Haas's justification for taking up didgidoos, on which he conjures up industrial sounds for a series of transnational duets. Blue Moon programs busy, anti-like patterns around his core drone. Anthony Coleman holds up organ simulators to it. Fred Frith's guitar stridulates against the didgidoos with a ferocity that ignites it, vocalist Keji Hano and Plokgams Koets separately mirror-invert its pitch. Cypri Bapista's percussive tones tempt Haas to take the instrument beyond its usual limits.

**Hatchan** Hatchan HATCHANOTE HACC  
1001 CO.

**Sleaze Art Illumination Rounds**  
WECE SLEAZEPATH V1 CD  
Two attractive packages: Hothot's disc comes in a handmade black box made a white slipcase, with beetle pins and pics of the city at night. The booklet's synopsis sketches a city alive with sinister spirits. And Hothot's music: stark, brutal, bowed and scraped from various electronic, stringed and percussion instruments, mirrors its shifting shapes with the kind of skill that made the *Brexithead* soundtrack such a quality delight. French married guitar and bass ensemble Sleaze Art's mail-order-only disc is loaded inside a zoro of the comic, and the sleeve is the fly bag it arrives in. Supplying more moves than Branca or Chatham, SA's inexorable forward roll is sustained through the massing of forces which singlemindedly crack down hard on a citrifer ally.

**Larry Kucharz** Metachoral  
Visiting Assistant Professor, Auburn University in 2009

An American computer composer, Kuczarz electronically stacks choral sounding parts into cathedral harmonies that raise the music heavenwards. The sound is not unlike that produced by an organ stop, or a mellotron, even. The music rises and falls like a pall of mist in a Werner Herzog mountain film. If it

doesn't carry the spiritual import of Popol Vuh's soundtracks, Kuchari's music is scarcely less gorgeous.

**Moo Moo** 母牛

There's more to Miao than met the met: her self-promotion, though from her half-naked sleaze portrait, through her branding Miao on everything she touches, she does her best to convince otherwise. Using ethnic instruments, violins and guitar, plus field recordings from India and Nepal, she has styled an absorbing travelogue interspersed with loose songs whose sense of space accurately conveys the shifts in consciousness the pieces describe. And just when it gets a little too New Age, she introduces some serious element that topples it in a different dimension.

**Merzbow** Space Metalizer album  
ALTMAG

**Billy?** Zappa Funny Moods over on [Bilby](#)

**Incipiently Asset Without Liability** run sun ovs co

The success of Japanese noise stems from a misunderstanding that equates Merzbow's confusion of weird sex and sexual assault with the myth of Japanese extremism. His discography is way out of proportion to the slim ideas it contains. In truth, his imagined cultural transgression is less that of salakemen who read SH! comics while rubbing themselves against women on crowded Tokyo trains. That Space Mutator contains more core interest than its predecessors is less noteworthy than Merzbow's impact on vocals like Billy?

Consider it cool to promote their noise output with the image of a twisted woman. The appearance is not so novel as it is deplored. They deserve better electronic arts like a speeded up city film. Start the energy flows of light calculating is thoroughfare and trip on their overloads of sound and mope.

**David Toop/Max Eastley** *New And Rediscovered Instruments*

A welcome 1975 release from Brian Eno's pre-Ambient Obscure label! Because it was partially set up as aural evidence that ideas that looked good on paper did really work, Eno's discs often served better as laboratory proof than as home listening. But this one's a pleasure to listen to: *Waterworks* are a common theme here. Eno's pieces are named for the sound sculptures that source his delicate sonic constructs: the hydrophone, metallophone and cellophone. Plop breaks the ice with a comic song before pitting into the unashamedly beautiful tonal explorations of "The Division Of The Bowhead Whale" for his electric guitar and bowed chordingboard backed with bass, fiddle and various percussion objects.

**Various Artists** Land Of The Rising Noise Vol 2 [amazon music](#)

**Various Artists** *Balls To The Wall/Magenta* *one euro 3213 03*  
Though still only volume two, Chamel Music's *Rising Nose* series documenting the Japanese underground has already outgrown its title: it's far more varied than its glitzy pop suggests. It ranges from Der psychoanalytische of early Neubauten member Peter Dinklage's "I'm a little bit of a psycho" longings of the amazing Shizuka and Volha Dotsy, to the knockabout punknoise comedy of Gay and Meli Banana. Perhaps the presence of so many women tips the balance away from sophomoric transgression (à la Herzog) to something that is less provocatively but more genuinely different. Recommended: *The Magenta* camp's eye-catching new artwork notwithstanding, this is a less discriminating trow of Japan's newer alternative. Hard to get carried away by its slinky or anonymous songs, but it's a damn cleverly chosen set. Cow Incapacitated and Meli Banana (with and without Yoshida Otsomo — are not giving much away here).

**Various Artists** Régénération  
Déclinaissance, avec et contre

What with its rusting steel plate fastened to an obituary black sleeve held together with crosspainted paperbands, the detrité French industrial site this collection elegises is almost impossible to enter. But persevere and you break into a Tarkovsky-like aural reconstruction of its history, replete with ghost echoes of a lost age. The international list of contributors, among them Auble, Illison, Of Safety and John Watermann, were given a tight brief in the form of soundings taken from the site (which you hear before each track proper) and a four-minute time limit. Most of them responded well to orders, resulting in that rare, a themed compilation that amply fulfils its premise.

**Vatra** BEHNDI STAMPANT SPEED 128 CD

The product of an inflammatory international art project surveying "the symbolic meaning, the power and masters of fire," *Brand* features the work of Dutch and German artists: Kees de Groot, Murr, Sluiskenshock and Croatian Ivan Fialko. The sound component — an audio play of heavy atmospheres broken up by a static of music and lost voices — is superimposed on images drawn from art history and film. It's never less than fascinating even when it's not always that bearable. But de Groot's "Verleugung" (deceit), which resets an Ernst Busch rendition of frontliner Brecht in a charmed wilderness of voices simply intoning the German for "German," "conscious" and "conscienceless" as is deeply affecting as it is unsettling. [...]



# freefall

**Clive Bell** plunges through music's protecting veil and enters the realm of sonic absurdity. This month: A new dawn for hotel Muzak

Our dear guests! 1997 is a landmark year for the Bell Hotel Group. First of all—looking to the past—Bell Group is proud to be able to celebrate nearly five years of luxury hotel management. The last five years have seen huge advances in all areas of life: digital camcorders, automated toilets, bicycle suspension systems, drum 'n' bass music, and 24-hour non-stop porno channels to name but a few, and the hotel industry has itself benefited from many of these changes. What, however, has not changed is the fundamental reason for which people use hotels: that is to say, international hotel customers require today in 1997, as they did in 1992, somewhere comfortable to sleep for the night, a choice of full English or Continental breakfast, and little pots of long-life milk in a wicker basket by the kettle. And in this respect, the aims of Bell Group have not changed either: our focus remains on offering our customers the ultimate in pampering and the highest standards of obnoxious behaviour. To quote one of our early slogans: "Let us spoil you something rotten."

Secondly, to look to the future, Bell Hotels Group in 1997 plans to develop a global product line, based on considerable market research, which we believe

identifies a fascinating niche: namely facilities devoted to 'musical hospitality'. Producers and consumers of music have always been a key client sector for us: early on we realised that breakfast should be served by 4pm. We have also become known for our 'Diddy Disco' miniature discotheques, at which our guests do the DJing while the hotel staff shuffle uneasily beneath a glitterball.

Now, at the Bell Bora Bora Hotel in Tahiti, we are developing an 'Illbert Wellness Class', in collaboration with a team of leading DJs, Bachelor Pad sonic designers and experts in shamanistic possession. At the Bell Bora Bora you can expect to find much more than a swimming pool, though we must mention that the pool is sand bottomed and incorporates a coral reef. Facilities will include a Hardstep fitness studio, Ambient Trance sauna and steam bath, sonic massage boutique, and a genuine voodoo whorlpool. Also, unique to the Bora Bora, The Beatbox Boys Musical Beauty Centre, with individual consultation sessions, to help our guests achieve musical beauty.

Already opened this spring in Germany is the Bell Hotel Sporting Club in Bad Baden. The Derek Bailey Suite is a deluxe nest of rooms, fully equipped with

expensive furniture, a radio and a little kitchen. The unrivalled luxury of the opening ceremony was timed to coincide with the International Festival Of Bailey in Bad Baden, the annual celebration of the unmistakable avant garde guitarist, at which elegant glitterati flocked to sumptuous banquets. The already fogging atmosphere was heightened even further by the surprise inclusion of Bailey's drum 'n' bass album on the shortest of the prestigious Mercury Music Prize.

The Hotel Sporting Club Bar is already well known for featuring, instead of a cocktail pianist, an improvising percussionist. Hotel guests are always welcome to sing along, or to contribute an instrumental turn. Harmonicas are provided free of charge, and are fired daily.

Finally a special 'Dark Weekend' offer from the Four Seasons Bell Bora Bora Hotel on the shores of Loch Ness, Scotland: guests staying a minimum of two nights at the Bora Bora will receive a soundproofed isolationist double bedroom with a view of the Loch, unlimited 'whiteout' sessions in the Black Noise Jacuzzi Suite, limousine transfer to and from Inverness airport, a free 50 CD box set of recent Japanese Noise releases, and an 'Ecotoplastic Catastrophe' gastronomic dinner for two in the Meribow Restaurant, with Deatchro DJ Leechbeek and complimentary bottle of vodka.

It remains for me to thank you, dear guests, as ever for your custom. As Bell Hotels Group moves into a new era, we shall ensure that our formidable hospitality and service ethic continue to patronise you at every opportunity. □

## Label distributors & contacts

Contact addresses are given for labels without named UK distributors. Labels not named here should be available from specialist retailers such as Depth Charge, Piccadilly, Rough Trade, These, etc. In emergencies, contact direct distributors such as Cargo, Greyhound, Harmonia Mundi, Impex, Kudos, Pennide, Recommended, RTH, Sade, These, Vaid, etc.

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# multi media

Scanning the interface of music and interactive media

## Coldcut

Let Us Play

NINJA TUNE CD-ROM (PROMIC)

If any of the first generation of UK cut 'n' paste Electro beatmakers were going to embrace or be seduced by the wider functionality of the enhanced CD, Coldcut were. Since establishing their Timeside Ninja Tune HQ as a digital playground where they could explore both the full implications of hard disc recording and editing alongside new developments in computer graphics, sound manipulation and state of the art video gaggy pokery in their equally prominent Hex incarnation, Matt Black and Jonathan Morfe have been grasping towards the multi-headed artform of the type that has now appeared as Let Us Play. This CD-ROM, which comes bundled with the music CD (reviewed in Soundcheck) is better value than most but no extra cost, containing a basic but innovative sequencing device, a quiz game, a play A-Z of facts you never really needed to know about Coldcut, an interactive archive of recent Coldcut film footage, and yet another virtual beatbox.

The most fun you can have on your computer when the boss isn't looking is "Playtime". Adapted from the "Synopsicon" — a meaning program developed for an installation at London's Barbican Centre — this is a mixing tool with a difference. Instead of a hackneyed pair of digital decks, or a basic "moving disk" as found on the majority of "roll your own" CD-ROMs, the interface resembles an ancient piece of wartime hardware that might turn up at a Czech flea market. Patched together by Hex associates Robert Pepperell and Miles Verman, with samples supplied by Coldcut, the module lets you move a total of 17 sliders under the separate headings "Drums", "Basses" and "Heads". Apart from three purple knobs under each

section, there are no further clues. In fact, this is the idea: the functions of each button aren't clearly defined, and the player's interaction with the music that emerges is not one of control. Instead, the experience is baffling, infuriating and enjoyable by turns as you strive to align the sliders in such a way as to create a decent loop. The catch is that the sound changes depending on the relationship of the sliders to each other, right across the board, as well as simply their vertical positions on the instrument. Thus, you may have latched into some neat groove and want to activate some of the bell-sonorities or cut-up voices that seem to come from the "Heads" end, but moving one of the sliders even a millimetre or so seems to affect the balance of the whole thing and you may be left with a tasterily crashed beat. Moreover, if you try to go back to the configuration you started with, it doesn't seem to be the same. In which case all you can do is click on one of the large circles below, which seems to lead in an entirely new set of sounds.

Even over a few hours playing it's impossible to discern many rules governing the drum thing, and that's paradoxically what holds the interest over longer periods. Once the glitches are teed up — this is apparently a prototype for software which is intended for use when playing live — this will be a moderately significant step away from linear sequencing. For now, the waits ensure that Coldcut — not you — remain the kindest of them all.

Most of the CD's other tidbits are one-offs wonders, although the Coldcut A-Z has some amusing tricks up its sleeve. However, the seven videos for tracks on the music CD are well worth having. Not being in possession of a TV set myself, I hadn't realised how much the visuals complement their recent music: "Frog Jam" and "Natural Rhythms" (directed by Stuart Warren-Hill) may go down as pioneering works in manipulated sound and vision at the dawn of the digital age in the same way that Vertov's *Man With A Movie Camera*, Hans Richter's 1930s colour animation experiments and Norman McLaren's graceful camera trickery explored film as mechanical pattern making device rather than visual narrative. On the other hand, Coldcut's more polemic tracks such as "Timber" (featuring a crushingly haunting Australian female voice singing a lament as each beat sends an axe into a tree trunk), "Noah's Ark" (a beat poem that says into the superficial world of club culture) and

Coldcut in yr computer



"Rangoscon" (samples of British environmental protesters in victory and defeat) are amplified and broadened out by their video treatments — these are miniature documents of profound unrest at the heart of contemporary Britain. And in case you want to contribute to that, they've thoughtfully included a large directory of contacts for such organisations as the Centre for Alternative Technology, the Campaign for the Freedom of Information, Red Jam the Streets, and, er, the Demos Tribe. Yes, you too can be a friend of Gae — from the comfort of your swivel chair.

## ROB YOUNG

Ninja Tune through Wear



## Various Artists

Deep Concentration/Ass-Mix  
OM RECORDS NO NUMBER CD-OM-40M

Florida's Om Records houses a bevy of turntable creakers such as Cut Chemist, DJ Swingers, DJ Wally, Rob Swift's X-Men, The Beat Junkies, Q-Burn's Abstract Message, Peanut Butter Wolf and others. This double CD set comes with an 11 track music disc featuring the above artists as well as Prince Paul, Lynce Born and Latex, plus a second CD containing Ass-Mix, a manual for DIY scratch

bombardiers. This digital beatbox is designed to enable the operator to roll out a choice of loosed, funky breaks and rhythms, and provide of custom made samples, and record the lot using a simple built in saving device. A couple of trial sonic antennas — headed "Tropo" and, inevitably, "Old School" — are included, with more available via the Om website.

A great idea, but one that here falls just short of the mark. A playback/recording interface at the bottom of the screen allows you to start up one of eight drum loops, and by mousing onto the rubbery-looking buttons on the console, you activate whatever sample type you have selected. Selections are made by cranking a handle on a kind of spring-jenny affair at top right, this gives the impression that the choice is random, but in fact they come up in a set order. It would have been useful to have some other way of jumping directly to the selections, rather than having to crank through them all in turn. Then you can record your sounds over the drum loop. Maybe it's the machine I was using, but recording seems to slow things down significantly, and it's not so easy to 'play' of the sounds on time. A four-stage track indicator shows you, with different coloured bars, where you have placed your instruments, but it's the devil's own work to reposition them satisfactorily once you're through, and it's not uncommon for one to get lost behind another. This makes the whole process feel rigid and linear. Further irritations could have been alleviated by creating a balance control between the rhythm and the samples, and a fast forward and rewind control — the slider provided is as awkward as a supermarket trolley.

The phantasmagoric package that so often accompanies packages like this too often does itself down in the end. Rehearsing the amount of effort that goes into coding the software, if it had been marketed as a pleasant add-on to what is a brilliant CD of music, all well and good. But the shape of things to come it isn't — mainly because, unlike Coldcut's ROR, it's a shape you can recognise and call a name.

## ROB YOUNG

Om Records through Carpa



а г а р и ф  
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debut album



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# on location

Going live: festivals, concerts, clubs in the flesh

## Ornette Coleman: ?Civilization?

USA: New York Lincoln Center Festival '97, Avery Hall

Ornette Coleman's *Sies Of America* presents deliberate, enormous contradictions on the vista of modern music's challenges. Is it jazz? A symphony? Or something else, perhaps a face-off of proto-American iconoclasm and Western European musical traditions?

By classical definition it's a concerto grosso, featuring Coleman, self-designated "computer-writer-performer," fronting his unique double quartet Prime Time along with a conventional orchestra (the New York Philharmonic, conducted by Kurt Masur). Yet *Sies* only rarely lets its full forces erupt. Weighty themes arise and burn from the score like prophetic stormclouds, lighter are blown through like wisps on the wind, and the exposures occasionally

break out in torrents of fiery, lively polyphony. Participating musicians, sound engineers, and audiences will be asked to examine their listening assumptions and adapt to new, if not second, a consistently new aesthetic.

*Sies*, first presented in 1972, rooted in *Ascension?*, four nights of Coleman's hemlock in practice as a series, entering the Lincoln Center's second annual summer festival of new and unusual international performances. Scheduled with Morton Subotnick's latest stage-of-the-synthesizer extravaganzas, and music-theatre productions, including a one-man *Pibro*, flute and cast of hundreds back South African *Proletariat*, *Ascension?* comprised, besides Coleman's most ambitious composed work, a sublime set with his career-long associates Charlie Haden and Billy Higgins, and a high-concept *Tone*. Going on with solos in including Lou Reed and Laurie Anderson. The four performances proved to be as shocking, affecting and subject to knowable shifts, as Coleman has been since his last appearances in New York, nearly 40 years

ago. Sight of build, gentle of demeanor, quizzical and buoyant charm, of nearly 70, Ornette played a vinyl-plastic-coated alto sax, trumpet and wore his shiny denture and shaggy hair despite the acoustic pitfalls of the home-like Avery Fisher Hall.

*Sies* was originally recorded in part by the Lincoln Philharmonic with Coleman as a soloist shortly after its premiere, and was revised by John Gardner, conductor of The Symphony Orchestra Of Fort Worth, Texas (Ornette's hometown) in the 1980s. The version Coleman released for Masur's interpretations seemed ardently wrought yet still compromised by time constraints on preparation (three days) and the orchestra's reluctance to tackle Coleman's fundamental theory affording players unusual liberties and responsibilities. And *Ornette* balance was a problem, as the wide, long, high-angled hall favored the strings, singing woodwinds and less so the horns of the orchestra, but made and Ornette Bryant's electric keyboards, Chris Rosenberg and Norm Wink on electric guitar, Albert McDowell and Brad Jones on electric, and double basses, respectively, Basil Roy's tuba, and Donardo Coleman's trap drums voice and distant.

Aaron Copland's *Prelude For The Common Man* was a... peeper for *Sies*, and Coleman chose brief dramatic readings from Martin Grahsm, Puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards,

Walt Whitman and Longinus Hughes, among others, to set and/or forestall the composition. Then *Sies* announced itself with the sort of deeply gleaming, acute depictions of human character and feeling that have always defined Coleman's art. The *Sies* carried the small-orchestra passages above an understated little drum tattoo, delivered with low brass and woodwinds, topped by muted high trumpets, then the throne, which had accumulated some power, belted as with a of Ornette's pose before returning to an elegant pace on the back of half a dozen walking basses. Following a breath-length pause Coleman charged in, breathlessly, on alto with Prime Time furiously active yet acoustically as disembodied as ghosts, bided him the juxtaposition was almost comic, yet the solo symphony, vocabulary Coleman distilled from earlier 20th-century American renaissance composers was, Coleman, Roy Harris, et al, replaced by his thoroughly personal re-creation of musical syntax and expressive dynamics, interactions and reflections, realized by a self-contained command and a few expressions.

Audience applause after each of Prime Time's sections emphasized the blocky structure of the *Sies*, remapping

Los, Laurie and Ornette







Si Begg

wherever flow Masur and Coleman might otherwise have accomplished — still, the Slesian-born, Leipzig-educated, globally renowned maestro guided, cabled, danced, willed the visibly diffident Philharmonic players through Coleman's syncopated, looping rhythms, honky-angulard and nursery-rhyme or folk-inspired riffs, such as "Dancing in Your Head." Other familiar strains of Coleman's oeuvre emerged, including "What Reason Could I Give," and on successive nights Ornette studied intently on sax to "The Star Spangled Banner" (his magnanimous opus seemed less fixed and finished than in continual process, particularly when Prime Time's configurations came into account; this is a different group than the BQs Prime Time with Jamaaladeen Tacuma, Ben Naï and Charlie Elbertse; its members refer less to pop soul, and are more self-conscious about their individual contributions to the whole spinning ball of wax).

If Siess sometimes seemed static, it rewarded patient contemplation, like star- or cloud-gazing; its latter episodes arguably repeated and delayed rather than advanced, as argument, but by then Prime Time and Ornette were warmed up and Masur was attuned to cueing in the optional symphonic burst.

Most of Coleman's fans love his big pieces less than his more intimate studies, though, and he could hardly have given them a greater gift than the final half of "Columbia's" nominally "academic jazz" concert. Perched on a stool with instruments close at hand, utterly exposed without mediating constraints of form or context, Coleman and his peers Haden and Higgins conversed at the highest level of intuitive musical communication, effortlessly and spontaneously in perfect balance, with sublime taste and no pretensions, affirming life by distilling the beauty of each moment in an eternal hour; it was heaven. The half itself was conquered: Coleman's swaying, earth-anchored saxophone was audible in its quietest offhand comments, whether uttering bottom line truths, or moaning, chuckling, confessing the blues, or offering the consoling of upward, yearning phrases and wordless, floating sighs.

Self-effacement ruled. Ornette indulged no gratuitous honk or superfluous trill. Haden exhibited an immense, softly woody tone and immaculate time. Higgins, lately recovered from a liver transplant, gave life to droning, propulsive rhythms with socks, mallets and

brushes. No tune titles were announced, but the musicians were well versed in Coleman's hopping hops, hypnotically winding lines and bluesy walk, motifs that launched almost a dozen separate tie fights of grisly gory discovery.

After the intermission, trumpeter Wallace Roney sought to contend with the legacy of Don Cherry, capturing some of the much-missed pocket trumpeter's gestures but not his playfulness or invention. Pianist Kenny Burrell extended Bud Powell's probing arborizations to Coleman's looser notions of harmony and collective impulse. Ornette revealed his love of Eckstine-era roadhouse crooning and his interest in Ellingtonian chamber jazzist songs by introducing smooth balladeer Chris Walker, an ex-Prime Time bassist, and a woman singer (name Tiki) with a classical clank and strong intonation, who shared a sugary love song. The instrumentalists concluded with Coleman's hit-based "The Turnaround," like it was "C Jam Blues."

After the triumphs of Coleman's reunion trio and Siess Of America, "Columbia's" Tone Dealing finale was anti-climatic. Ornette and Prime Time dove eagerly enough into their current repertoire, which boasts vague and complex, that are generally understated. Superficially relaxed, the funk rhythms are at core hot and grinding, the colorfully simple themes percolate as byproducts of postulates, the chthonic rolling arrangements are actually transparent and lush. The musicians were impassive amid dancers, contortionists, performers jumping on broken glass, a relentless film clip montage of exotic curiosities and atrocities, and guest slots by Liu Reed (whose pseudo punk mumble and basic rock chord progression reduced Prime Time to the role of garage rehearsal backup band) and Robert Laursen (whose voice-processing speech-breach broached a compelling affinity with Coleman's sex through the musma of the whole group).

Though dizzying, such trapings enhanced Coleman's music most by casting it in strong relief. He stands as an antithesis to the contemporary, presumably non-ideological yet highly commercialised sensory overload, his music the balm for such bombardment. "Columbia?" — that's a really big question. Ornette Coleman? He aspires to the lightness and dark, the dirth and breadth of the skies.

**NOWAD HANDIL**

## A Taste Of Wonderland U.K. London Ministry Of Sound

Ah, a damboree — now that's entertainment. In the middle of the floor in the largest of the Ministry Of Sound's three shapeless spaces, the Queen of Hearts, on stilts, is waving the weather of all croquet matches against a similarly stilt-mounted, pouting opponent. A living deck of cards is bending over backwards — literally — to ensure the Queen wins. They're been 'painting the roses red' all over the Ministry as well: the dancefloor has been tricked out with mild hallucinogenic (read: nauseously discoloured) paper mache flora, polystyrene foliage and plaster tree trunks — the kind of decor favoured by now defunct clubs like Megastrolchs, where clubbers used to kid themselves they were getting rocky.

Right, and it's Henry Thorow. In the course of this invasion of one of London's largest temples of boomie Electronics labels Warp, Roadrubs and ever various brothers and sisters in arms, you find many of the reasons why UK electronic music seems to be running so doggedly on the spot. Two of its most interesting and productive deejays were poised at the event (a preview for a full UK tour this coming autumn): the ragged timbrel of Richard James, Tom Jenkinson and their circle at one end, and the husk-dry math-a-gur of Cristian Vogel's Brighton squiggle. It's all in the decor: the previously mentioned plastic foliage provided the Magic Roundabout-like setting for the Warp axis Simon Pyle, aka Freeform, has been disconnected from the national power grid for a week, and therefore hasn't been able to prepare much music for tonight's show. Instead he scratch-builds a track off the top of his head, improvising around one of his odd, galactic-wobble rhythms on a powerful sampling drum machine. It would be nice to see other disc programmers take their cool reps in their hands like this — people like Richard D James, for instance. Five years

## on location

down the line from his anthemic opening gambit such as "Analogic Bubblebath" and "We Are The Music Makers," he appears to be driven by an emotional and intellectual vacuum. The music he's spinning tonight is mostly characterless, unlikely enough, and if any of it was his own, it's getting increasingly difficult to spot. What he and the Redfish Records posse — a spry-looking bunch who have come to fetishize useless computer technology — really want is to have a good laugh, and it's chuckles aplenty when Tom Jenkinson operates the decks. While Alpha (in the DJ loft), Jenkinson has to be placed in full view so that the crowd can get the full benefit of his serene antics. Usually it's unpleasant to watch performers having more fun than anyone else in the building, but Sauerbush's stage trics are genuinely infectious.

Worshipping the glitch with a permanent ear-to-ear grin on his mug, Tom says through short segments of futuristic Techno, classic Acid and breakbeat tracks (including the "Toytrain ride" favourite "To The Trumpton") while filling in time with such 80s older-brother tracks by Ultravox, MC Hammer, Bros and The Police's "Walking On The Moon." It's certainly giving the key elements of the fledgling "quirk jazz" scene, where performers have tonight, a run for their money. Hardly, from the Spymunk label, is chosen dancing down the front, for god's sake! In the beamed British Techno scene, Jenkinson's set is an oasis of disorder.

Well, almost becalmed. At the far end of the Ministry, Si Begg is preaching a new order from two decks in a high pulp (albeit one festooned with a prominent drinks company logo). If some factors seem about to isolate themselves by their sheer glossy aloofness, Begg and his friends Cristian Vogel and Justin Berlew seem driven by a zeal not often seen in these shores. For anyone (myself included) conditioned to treating most DJing as a secondary act, Begg's set — a bumpy, high-altitude ride at

PHOTOGRAPH BY GARY BURGESS



Tom Jenkinson

## on location

twice heartbreak rage — is a major brain burn Likewise, the following frantic live set by Justin Benbow doesn't impose top-down discipline on the assembled listeners, but excites the metabolism and induces the desire for change, which is satisfied by his improvised, almost casual flips of the filters. The dancers whirl and contort, celebrities at this secular ritual of release, then they mysteriously disappear under Cristian Vogel's appearance. Only in England could someone like Vogel empty a room, which is presumably why he finds a more receptive home at Berlin's Tresor label. After a turn-of-brow, Pluram-on-into, Vogel launches a volley of beats that drop at the feet like bastedines, complemented by video loops of precision tooling, hi-tech medical educational films and mass land clearance. It's a pity the powerful vision that Vogel's outfit is developing was relegated to a side-show

### BOE YOUNG

The Planet Alice tour visits venues around the UK in October

## Trafics Festival France, Nantes L'Usine Lu

A mere Eurostar ride away from London, in Nantes, deep in Muscadet country, the Trafics Festival offers a seemingly *inexhaustible* combination of international performance and cuisine. Taking place in a former biscuit factory, L'Usine Lu is a *petit bureau's* throw from Nantes Cathedral. Five stages, live kitchens, rock, cabaret, noise, Ambient, theatre and performance art are thrown with abandon into the soup and served up in a vast banqueting arena. At the very least, it's a good excuse for getting pissed and listening to some live music, if I wanted, I could even pretend I was work.

I arrive to find my French is shot to pieces. It doesn't seem to matter, no one knows what's going on anyhow. There are no signs as to who's playing and when, acts suddenly appear on stage and perform unannounced. I'm so late I have missed Joseph Rocaille. Some art student types start flinging a pig's head about and injecting an animal heart with Coca-Cola. Oh dear. An hour later, Joseph Rocaille

appears and makes me wish I had missed him. The former Sade-esque prankster has turned into a noisy boobyish ham. I retreat to study some menus. Away from the diners, guitarist Keith Rowe has teamed up with American saxophonist Jeffrey Morgan. Their playing is a freely judged and self-effacing model of subtlety and control. Based down the road in Villet, Rowe is busy becoming a local celebrity as this and that French group absent-mindedly come AFM as an inspiration. The longer the festival goes on, he's forced to reuse motifs and more disclaimers.

Back to the tables to chat, sharing plates of sack meats, couscous, creme brulee and cheap local wine. As usual, in idle moments I find myself checking out where the power points are, counting the number of staff, anxiously drawing up rough budgets and spotting gaping holes in the fabric of the event. There are several dozen acts, but no women performers, although Eliot Dornier's unmissably dirt show features a naked "model" who stands potlessly spotted centre-stage. "Not now, cheese like," the guy in the group seems to be saying as he struts and poses before us. It's excruciating. A white-faced clown troves, in a festival that's uniformly — drab — Caucasian, incomprehensibly prattle on and clutch at their groins until the audience begins to complain and bang their cutlery. A man with a startling resemblance to Benny Hill comes on in a dress and shows videos of staring refugees and of his own enormous gob being force-fed spaghetti while he berates us about the war in Bosnia. It's beyond distasteful. When a film crew wheels towards us, throwing images of diners up onto the screen, I ready myself for a fight.

I'm chomping on my own chauvinism when a smiling Frenchman us down and gives me a cassette. His English is worse than my French, but we smile and shout at one another above the del, as though anything will come of this transaction. "Yeah, great, merci!" I'm hungry, so we buy more wine. ZGA, flying in from St. Petersburg, haven't shown up. German noise terrorists Faust perform breathlessly on one stage, emerging as if from a mid-70s time capsule, while French avant rockers Ulan Bator, their professional rock body language

learned from Sonic Youth, play alongside one another. It's hard to tell what's what. The heat from the kitchens is stifling. Is this a concert you eat at or a food fair with music? In the toilets they broadcast the local radio station, whose interviews with the performers are taking place in front of a kinetic artwork some way off. The artwork, lots of wooden crates filled with stones, is so loud that nothing else can be heard. Everyone continues chattering like it's not really there.

Next day ZGA have arrived. I don't show up in time to hear them. Les Terres Naines seem to be performing every night and I seem unable to avoid them. They are the worst group I have ever heard in my life. They are described in the programme as a performance group who have chosen to use rock music as a vehicle for their art, or some such drivel, which only makes me dislike them even more intensely. I have to leave the building to get away from them and sit on the fire escape by the dusters to calm down. As I go, their someone say their leader is related to one of the organisers.

David Thomas & Two Rise Boys promise welcome relief, but the mix sounds like it is being led through caramel custard, rendering Thomas's charming stones audible. Thoroughly bored by this carmelosness, I retreat upstairs instead to find Charlemagne Palestine. Dressed in a baseball cap and some of Eugene Chadbourne's cast-offs, he sits at a Bosendorfer piano and a throng of about 3000 crotchety types, some gigantic, most small and annoyed shoulder to shoulder. Charlemagne's dense chord clusters, brain-scrambling overtones and nasal whine send me off into a dream of



childhood, its harsher textures erased, its sharp edges rendered harmless.

After his performance we talk, or at least Charlemagne does, as we trade swigs on a bottle of cognac, describing his warehouse full of soft gods, home of the dumb, obedient idols whose presence by the piano embodies the weird kind of cool that the sweaty audience can only envy. Palestine is in residency here and on a raft. He enthuses about his work, about Europe, about the giggling girls who walk away from the massed ranks of teddy bears. I pretend, but I can't quite reach him in his realm of infectious wonder. Sensing my spiritual vacancy will not be filled by brandy alone, he draws me over to the side of the stage and plucks a toy from his collection. "Here — give this to someone you love!" He presses a felt and satin banana into my hand. I nod earnestly and depart. Later, in the early hours, I give it to Keith Rowe's dog.

GO RAKTER

Silver Apples DJ Tim Gane Snatchster

26.1.1988

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WIRE

SCRATCH #17

# new notes at a glance

## information from SPNM

new notes, the monthly listings magazine published by SPNM, is an essential guide to what's happening in new music, specialising in the composed music circuit. Events listed in full in **new notes** are summarised on this page.

The current edition of **new notes** describes a host of opportunities for up-and-coming composers and anyone interested in what's going on in new music. Why not join us? Ring 0171 828 9606 to find out more.

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### 28 London Symphony Orchestra

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# new notes

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## Space Is The Place: The Lives And Times Of Sun Ra

By John F. Szwed

PAYBACK PRESS (PRC \$12.99)

On the occasion of the Apollo 11 moon landing — the first time human feet touched down on a celestial body outside of earth — Sun Ra was a prominent enough figure for *Esquire* magazine to ask him for a public statement, alongside Muhammad Ali, WH Auden, Truman Capote, Ed Koch, Kurt Vonnegut, Isaac Asimov, Robert Graves and other shining lights in the worlds of art and politics. "Reality has touched against myth," he wrote in a trenchant, single free-verse stanza: "Humanity can move to achieve the impossible/Because when you've achieved the impossible the others/Come together to be with their brother, the first impossible/Borrowed from the rim of the myth/Happy Space Age To You."

That word "myth" is important because, as this extraordinary, absorbing and long overdue account of the life and vision of Sun Ra reveals, he viewed the whole seemingly tangled web of myth as a smoking volcano, and something had chosen him to make it erupt. The much misunderstood career of Herman "Sonny" Blount, the quiet, hernia-racked bookworm from Birmingham,

Alabama, only begins to make sense in the context of the religious, hermetic, and apocalyptic strain of secret history and prophecy in which he had immersed himself from an early age, but few critics, commentators or biographers have seen fit to plunge into the mystery of Mister Ra.

John F. Szwed, Professor of Afro-American Studies, Music and American Studies at Yale University, and a long-time worshiper at the temple of Ra, has tackled the subject head-on by following in Sonny's intellectual footsteps. The force of this is to locate Sun Ra once and for all as a key figure in the dissemination of the marginalized, black versions of history which filtered into the public domain during the 60s and 70s via the zebra-black arts of John Coltrane, Jim Hendrix, Miles Davis, Parliament/Funkadelic (and beyond to their descendants: the producers with the knowledge in black forms of Electro, Hip-Hop and Techno, and the fervent ecstasies of

today's cosmic jazz masters David S. Ware, Charles Gayle, William Hooker and their acolytes). On all these, Le Sun has burnt his mark.

Szwed may be an academic, but he doesn't write like one, and the book is the better for it. Neither does he drop his guard, as the majority of white respondents to Sun Ra, and portray him as some kind of freak, a nutbar, mngmazer at the psychedelic circus. Instead, he demonstrates how hard-won was Sun Ra's notorious fame. Following a detailed account of Sonny's spell in what was effectively an American concentration camp for wartime conscientious objectors — apparently the biggest single crisis of his life, which set the seal on his subsequent outsider status — and some kind of half-remembered out-of-body or abduction experience, it took nine years, from the end of the war until 1954, for him to have clocked up enough swing-hours with Fletcher Henderson in Chicago (Henderson played the role of an "angel" in Ra's life), one-off dates with visiting jazzmen, and in his own trio, before his last notions for the broad church that would become The Arkestra began to emerge. Even then, this first octet was told, things

"would be different." This band would not make money, they might have to rehearse five, maybe ten years before they would be ready to play in public. Like a space-age Noah, he told them that he wanted them to help him prepare for what was coming." After a further seven years, Sonny — now with birth certificate altered to read Le Sonny Ra — arrived in New York to fulfill his destiny. We see a practical side to Ra's "otherness": as well as his spiritual heresies, he was among the first to adopt synthesizers and invented electronic instruments, integrate the process of tape recording into the business of

rehearsing and performing, and distribute his own music on his home-grown B. Saturn imprint. Then, through interviews with surviving group members — Ra called them "home scientists" — Szwed pieces together The Arkestra's slow, eventful progress and gentle rise to prominence through the 70s to Ra's departure from the planet in 1993.

If anything, the book doesn't go far enough during this later section. Szwed is so good on Sun Ra's early reading and research that you're dying to get a sense of the territory he moved into during the last half of his career (the matter of Sun Ra's unusual passport, and the nature of secret documents which were delivered to him during a visit to Turkey, remain tantalizing mysteries). But there is consolation in an almost verbatim account of a lecture series which Ra gave to students at Berkeley in 1971, and incisive analyses of Sonny's complex semantic play, poetry-writing, some of which is reproduced here.

theories of "end-time", and (towards the end of his life) foreign travel to the ancient archaeological sites of Egypt and Mexico.

This is a formidable subject that has been crying out for an equally formidable chronicler. Szwed's attention to detail has produced a volume that will act as a fascinating springboard to alternative channels through world history and modern music alike. To this book of revelation, then, a resounding amen.

ROB YOUNG

## All American Music

By John Rockwell

DA Capo (PRC \$14.95)

The Mayflower had hardly landed when the Americans began promoting their New Frontier mythology. And here is John Rockwell, some 300 years later, singing the same tune: "As a society built upon the very



Le Sonny Ra

PHOTO: GAIL WINTER

ideas of ecumenicalism and catholicity, as the leading technological and industrial nation of our time, and as the principal nexus between European high art and the musics of other classes and cultures, America stands at the forefront of the music of tomorrow I've already heard some of that music, and I'm here to tell you it's terrific."

Well, the odd outlier aside — leading technological and industrial nation? Criminally wasteful First World bulges in how others might see it — many of us are still prepared to buy into the myth on the very strength of the musics Rockwell references. His subtitle reads *Composition In The Late 20th Century*; indeed, music most everywhere in the world would be inconceivable without the impact of American energy and migration, the tremendous vitality of its popular culture (from jazz through Hollywood to every kind of rock), its downright carelessness and its mythical pioneering spirit. But you don't have to be a raving perko comme fig to find Rockwell's flagwaving a little quaint, to say the least.

Culled from his journalism in *The New York Times*, for which he wrote about classical and rock music in the 70s, *41 American Music* was originally published in 1983. Remaining true to his day job's twin tasks, his original introduction outlines a populist agenda, which is pursued across 20 chapters, each headed by a representative artist. His opening salvo is as absurdly protectionist as the current administration's policy on anyone who does business with Cuba. Focusing on Kurt Weill's contemporary, the German emigré Ernst Krenek (composer of *Jonny Suede*), his first chapter tackles the cultural inferiority complex of US composers vis à vis their European counterparts, many of whom — Schoenberg, Weill, etc. — crossed the Atlantic to escape Nazi persecution. There's a point to be made here, but the failing is all-American: If its music feels intimidated, maybe it just isn't good enough to compete with the Europeans. If Schoenberg and the later Stravinskis held too much sway over US artists, maybe the latter had neither the courage nor the imagination to shift positions from under its great weight. To attack the emigres now is carelessly to extend across time and space the persecution that took them to America in the first place.

Later, he valiantly tries to bring more difficult figures — Ashley, Babbitt, Cage. Carter — into popular orbit. But even then his championing of "difficulty" is soured by his chastisement of, say, Milton Babbitt for refusing to relocate to favorable the cosmopolitan and instead wilfully pursuing his singular, unwavering vision. In Rockwell's skewed view, the composer's neglect of the needs and tastes of the congeneric audience raises the issue of who pays for such artistic license. Essays on the aforementioned Babbitt, Ralph Shapey and the more approachable tonal composer David Del Tredici delve into the problems of public money, private patronage and commercial solutions, and how changing means of support might influence their

directions. Yet these are local battles, of more interest to American readers, perhaps. And, for all their cultural-historical interest, they're mired by the author's lack of generosity towards anyone prepared to risk leaving a popular audience behind. How about artistic vision, John? Not every music is for everyone and there is nothing eldritch in artists wanting to realize their own singular visions. During its fulfillment any other considerations are of absolutely no account, and its down to critics to explore and explicate notions of "difficulty," thereby opening the music up to its largest potential audience by underscoring a composer's great and various excitements. Sad to say, Rockwell's middlebrow prose is a little too event-driven and dispassionate either to intellectually engage his readers with the music or generate much of an emotional response.

In terms of the book's structure, things get worse as the century progresses. His attempts to convince his more elitist New York Times readership of the value of downtown experiment, downtown jazz and downtown rock might well have been useful from a local perspective. But if it means he has to overcompensate for non-classical music's simplicity by condescendingly playing up its emotional connection with a broader public, then the view from below ought to be, get back uptown and take your academic snobberies with you. The Pinnalistic chapter headed by Philip Glass — a revealing choice, why not lead with the more rigorous Terry Riley? — and another on Laurie Anderson bridge the classical and the popular under the rubric of art music. Meanwhile, Ontario Coleman and The Art Ensemble Of Chicago represent jazz and improvisation. These latter sections are cursory to say the least, and even worse are the Neil Young and Talking Heads chapters on rock. Here, the limitations of Rockwell's original brief, and his refusal to revise and update the book, are most crudely exposed. For one, the book potentially addresses a far wider audience than *The New York Times*, so arguments about selection on the grounds that these are names his readers can compare are somewhat fatuous. And any book that reduces The Velvet Underground to an extended footnote in a Talking Heads-led chapter on art rock has taken an absurd error of judgment that ought to have been corrected in the second edition.

But the only new writing the edition offers is a preface that mumbles something about not wanting to spoil "the integrity of the original as a document, both of the century's music and the debates that were current when he was putting it together." Claiming his intention was to break down the barriers separating serious and popular music, cultures, his fear now is that the popular lobby has won, making life even harder for supposedly difficult artists, be they jazz, noise, experimental or of composers. Well, it's your victory, John. Enjoy it.

DAVID KOPF

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WIRE

# david toop

at the court of Korean kings

Strange items caught my eye in recent issues of the very magazine: not so much that five-page feature devoted to the Derek Bailey/John Lee Hooker duo album, Hooker playing in a hi-tech studio in San Francisco and Bailey sitting in his rocking chair on the back porch in Clayton pickin' on a big ole Epiphone, the two of them linked via ISDN lines, bounced off the buggy on Mars and back down to the new Digital Jukebox service that delivers albums as they are made, or even before.

Nor was it the Hello-style picture story, shot by Araki, that took up an unnecessary ten pages just to detail the minutiae of Björk recording with Mezzow in a secret studio in Kinshasa.

Nope. First it was a passing reference to "child haters" that drilled my brain pan. Then it was the dedication of the entire last issue to newborn babes with Wile affiliations. This "taking a stand on children's business left me in a state of shock. I just don't expect it from a music magazine. I mean, music fans, if they have children they keep them in the attic to make room for more CD shelves. If they don't have children then they spend their lives in states of bafflement, wondering why some people are so much shorter than others, why they ride about in plastic cars with no engines, why they wear nappies and why they can't hum "Good Vibrations."

Fact is, the child thing changes your perspective drastically. Just to write this column I had to go through a two-hour session of negotiation this morning with the seven-year old who adds a grid of order to my life. She being on summer holiday and me being in one of the busiest work phases of my year means that the act of switching on the computer and starting to write is the major achievement, content is an afterthought.

Though if we're going to bring children into the magazine then I can say that two recent experiences are relevant. I'm not much of a concertgoer anymore but free tickets were offered for two events within days of each other. Juliette may be seven years old but she's seen everything from Cambodian court music to sound poetry. I figured she's ready for the whole 'stn down in a seat for two halves and an interval and listen quietly business.

Decorum and quiet were not strictly necessary at the first show, which happened to be Michael Jackson at Wembley Stadium. Yes, yes, yes, I know what you're thinking: how could he? In truth, if I had been the repriorer with the notebook that I once was, I too could have written one of those deliriously spiteful reviews

God knows, there was a plethora of material both barking mad and risible.

But there you are, sitting next to your darling child, light of your life, who may not have much interest in Michael Jackson per se, but who is pretty thrilled with the sensation of sitting among so many people, hearing so many explosions and drinking so much Diet Coke. No, this is not a sharp laser of criticism, though neither were any of the reviews I read, and every bliscous point they made could be heard in a pub or street anywhere, given out ad nauseum by unpaid amateurs without the need for press tickets and hospitality area passes.

What's to say about Michael Jackson? He's bonkers. Everybody knows it. Yet people like him. His true habitat is the stage. Elsewhere he is lost.

I thought about that a lot in the few days before our next outing, which happened to be something completely different. If I had to make a Top 100 singles of all time list (and I assume that thousands of "enthusiasts" are doing just that on their own websites right now) then Michael Jackson's "Rock With You" would be in it.

Top 100 albums would have to include the late John Levy's recordings of Korean court music, made in Seoul in the late 60s. Levy was one of the great recordists of Asian music. "Nothing sounds quite in tune," he wrote about Confucian shrine music, "and one must enjoy these deliciously archaic sounds in the same way that both the Chinese and the Koreans do, that is to say, with a sort of evergreen youthful gaiety."

Listening to ancient Korean music such as A-ak and Sugech'on fills me with a searing sensation of eating raw ginger and garlic while being beaten with brambles in a rhythm that would make a tortoise seem quick. Though I don't pursue that particular path in my sex life, I do enjoy it in music. Juliette doesn't yet have a sex life, of course, nor much experience of Confucianism, so I wondered how she might take to an evening of Korean traditional music and dance at the South Bank.

Ominously, the evening began with a speech delivered by an ambassador. This was followed by the first group, playing my beloved Sugech'on at gratingly slow pace. For a child this must be a bit like being made to eat broccoli followed by cabbage. I feared the worst: shuffling in seat, chronic boredom symptoms, disruption, even an international incident.

Fortunately, we were saved by some loud drumming and choreographed folk dancing, along with a fan



dance in the style of Busby Berkeley — items that could spoil my evening in normal circumstances. In the interval we commingled with a critic not unknown to these pages. Seeking to distract Juliette from the blatant theft of her craps, he asked her for a ruling on who, or what was best: Michael Jackson or seventh-century Korean music.

She gave the nod to Korea, which could prove a lot or nothing. Maybe she's already learned how to schmooze Wile critics. Maybe she's set aside a strictly limited store of responses designed to humour me in lieu of some Spice Girls tickets in the future. Or maybe Michael's military marching and explosions just didn't match up to the pungent charms of a Korean dippe. Search me, children don't elaborate a great deal when it comes to comparative muscology. I put it down to evergreen youthful gaiety. □



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